

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF SPORTS  
TALK RADIO & THE FEMALE LISTENER**

**By**

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### General

Wanna talk sports? Forget the local pub or sports bar. Sports fans have found a new social setting for their “Monday morning quarterbacking” needs. It is a place where they gather to vent anger and frustration by name-calling, criticizing, complaining, and second-guessing players, coaches, fans, radio hosts and other callers. It is called sports talk radio, and it is coming to a station near you.

#### Background

The sports talk radio phenomenon began a little more than a decade ago when WFAN AM radio in New York began broadcasting in July 1987. At that time, it was the only all-sports talk radio station in the U.S. But instead of sweeping the nation, the sports talk radio format jumped from the East Coast to Oklahoma. In 1988, John Fox introduced WWLS AM Sports Radio to central Oklahoma (Tramel, 1999). The Norman-based station was the second all-sports radio station in the nation. Within a couple of years, 25 to 30 sports-stations were operating, and by 1995, WWLS even had a local competitor, SportsTalk 1340 AM. Today, there are more than 237 sports radio stations across the nation (Callahan, 1998), including three in Oklahoma.

The sports talk format continues to thrive, and as Casey Vineyard (personal communication, February 11, 1998), former operations manager at WWLS 640 AM in Norman, Oklahoma, pointed out, it is not just men who are listening and calling in to discuss sports matters. She said the sports talk radio station she previously worked for

fielded around 10 female callers a day, and most were mothers with sons or aunts with nephews who were playing sports. Mike Holt (personal communication, February 12, 1998), former General Sales Manager of WWLS in Norman, Oklahoma, agreed. He said the station typically drew 20,000 listeners a day, both male and female. And of the 20,000 who did tune in; anywhere from 74-80 percent of them were males. Females made up anywhere from 20-26 percent of the station's listeners.

WWLS 640 AM merged with Oklahoma City's SportsTalk 104.9 FM, formerly SportsTalk 1340 AM, in July 1998 to become The Sports Animal network, and tripled its listening audience in the Oklahoma City metro area. The 1998 Arbitron radio ratings book showed that of The Sports Animal's 60,900 listeners who regularly tune-in to the station, 3,385 or 5.6 percent are females.

Gerry Wilburn, general sales manager of KQLL Sports Talk Radio in Tulsa, Oklahoma, estimated that four to five percent of listeners to his sports talk radio station are females (personal communication, September 27, 1999). This contradicts a 1999 Tulsa Radio Report from Cox Communications that claimed 100 percent of KQLL's audience was male.

It is no secret that sports talk radio is geared toward the male listener. Longino (1997) looked at the debut of WQXI-AM Sports Radio in Atlanta in Spring 1996. She said the "guy talk format" focuses on mostly sports and women, with testosterone-laden commercials and snippets of rock music sprinkled in. During its second day of operation WQXI hosts opened the phone lines for two topics of discussion: (1) What would you name Atlanta's potential hockey team? and (2) Which colleges have the "hottest babes" and which have the "ugliest wenches"? Longino said listening to the station is "kind of



like eavesdropping on a Saturday night poker game at Al Bundy's house" (p. 2).

Discussions on at least one of Oklahoma's three sports talk radio stations is no different. The Sports Animal in Oklahoma City features an Annual "Babe Tournament" in which listeners vote for the best-looking females from a field of 64 entries. The tournament coincides with the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) basketball playoffs. The Sports Animal is a place where hosts often refer to attractive women as "majors," and sexual innuendoes are the norm. With discussions centering on babes, booze and athletics, the phenomenon of women tuning in to sports talk radio is worth exploring.

#### Statement of the Problem

Although sports talk radio has continued to expand during the past decade, (Callahan, 1998; Tramel, 1999) very little research has been conducted on this popular radio format. Sports talk radio stations pride themselves on their testosterone-laden "jock-talk" and manly humor; however, Oklahoma Arbitron ratings show that women are tuning in to this radio format as well. The question is why? What satisfactions are these women getting from listening to sports talk radio? What kinds of needs are they meeting by listening? And furthermore, what do women do with the information they obtain from sports talk radio?

#### Purpose of the Study

Sports talk radio offers sports fans a forum for exchange and comment. Although the medium is extremely popular, no research has been conducted on the topic. The obvious question centers on the uses and gratifications of sports talk radio audiences. But an even more interesting question centers on the reasons why women are listening and the

kinds of topics they identify as worth listening to. Therefore, the purpose of this study is twofold. First, an attempt will be made to construct a profile of women who listen to sports talk radio. In addition, this study will identify female sports fans' uses and gratifications from participating in sports talk radio. This research study will help understand the gratifications of women who listen to sports talk radio, and explore how women are using the information presented on these programs. An analysis of women's uses and gratifications will be compiled and provide a baseline for future research on sports talk radio.

### Research Objectives

Through this exploratory research, the following questions will be answered:

1. What are the descriptive characteristics of females who listen to sports talk radio in Oklahoma?
2. Why do women listen to Oklahoma's sports talk radio stations?
3. What do women do with information obtained from Oklahoma's sports talk radio stations?
4. What role does companionship play between listener and host or caller?
5. How might sports talk radio stations attract more female listeners in Oklahoma?

### Methodology

A series of focus groups, using a purposive sample of female sports talk radio listeners, was conducted in September and October 1999 in three locations: Stillwater, Oklahoma; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; and Tulsa, Oklahoma. Each of these cities was selected based on the presence of a sports talk radio station: KSPI AM in Stillwater;

WWLS AM and FM, The Sports Animal in Oklahoma City; and KQLL AM in Tulsa. Each focus group met for approximately 90 minutes.

In addition, in-depth telephone interviews were held with 19 female sports talk radio listeners from Oklahoma and Texas. All of the listeners tuned in to Oklahoma's sports talk radio stations either via traditional radio or Internet broadcasts. Both focus group and in-depth interview participants were asked to answer questions designed to help construct a profile of the female sports talk radio listener. Common themes and differences within and between focus groups and the in-depth interviews were then identified and analyzed.

#### Significance of the Study

A study of women who listen to sports talk radio is important because little research has been conducted on the sports talk radio audience. Information obtained in this exploratory study will provide a baseline for future research on the topic using information and topics females identified as important reasons why they participate. The findings from this research can also serve as a guide for sports talk radio managers who are seeking to attract a larger female audience.

#### Scope and Limitations of the Study

Subjects for this study were limited to listeners of Oklahoma's sports talk radio stations. Female listeners in New York or California may use sports talk radio for very different reasons than those who were interviewed for this study. In addition, because only qualitative methods and purposive samples were used, the information cannot be generalized to the entire population of females who listen to sports talk radio stations in

Oklahoma or other locations.

### Organization of the Study

Chapter II, a topical review of the literature, includes information on talk radio. women and radio in general and women and sports talk radio.

Chapter III outlines the research methodology used in the study, as well as the data collection plans and methods of analysis.

Chapter IV reports the findings and analysis of the data.

Chapter V includes a brief summary of the study, conclusions and suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Theoretical Framework

##### Uses and Gratifications

The uses and gratifications theory states that audiences are active and seek out specific forms of media content to meet needs and obtain satisfactions (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). Research on the uses and gratifications theory can be traced back to the 1940s. These early studies focused on particular types of content including radio quiz programs, soap operas and classical music (Rayburn, 1996).

One of the earliest uses and gratifications studies was conducted during the 1940s by Herta Herzog. The researcher explored why women were tuning in to daytime serials, also known as radio soap operas. Herzog found that women listened for emotional release, wishful thinking and advice. One of the most comprehensive uses and gratifications studies focused on children's use of television. Wilbur Schramm concluded that children watch television for three primary reasons: information, entertainment and to participate in social activities associated with viewing (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995).

The guiding model for uses and gratifications research for the past 20 years was developed by Blumler and Katz (Rayburn, 1996). They described the uses and gratifications approach as:

one concerned with social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations of the mass media or other sources, which lead to differential patterns of media exposure, resulting in need gratifications and other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones. (as cited in Rayburn, 1996, p. 147)

Many uses and gratifications studies have focused on various genres of television; however, other media and media content have been studied including home VCRs (Cohen, Levy, & Golden, 1988), supermarket tabloids (Salwen & Anderson, 1984), Jamaican radio call-in shows (Surlin, 1986), and daily horoscopes (Weimann, 1982).

According to Blumler (1979), social environment plays an important role in media-related needs. Exploratory studies of the social origins of media consumption appear frequently in the literature (Hur & Robinson, 1981; Kippax & Murray, 1980; Lull, 1980; Rubin, 1981; Rubin & Rubin, 1982). These studies have found that a variety of gratifications sought and obtained have empirical relationships with age, education, gender, family communication patterns, discussions with other people and membership in organizations. Dominick (1999) found that some media users seek a social utility gratification. They satisfy their needs to affiliate with others by using the mass media to share experiences. Other theoretically oriented studies have examined relationships between potential for social interaction and parasocial interaction with the media.

#### Parasocial Interaction

The term parasocial interaction was first introduced in 1956 by Donald Horton and Richard Wohl. It provides an explanation for the way the media and media performers present the illusion of an interpersonal relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Horton and

Wohl described the role of the persona, or performer, as the “typical and indigenous figure of the social scene presented by radio and television” (p. 216). They said that the persona offers a continuing relationship and that:

his appearance is a regular and dependable event, to be counted on, planned for and integrated into the routine of daily life. His devotees live with him and share the small episodes of his public life – and to some extent even his private life away from the show. Indeed, their continued association with him acquires a history, and the accumulation of shared past experiences gives additional meaning to the present performance. This bond is symbolized by allusions that lack meaning for the casual observer and appear occult to the outsider. In time, the devotee – the ‘fan’ – comes to believe that he ‘knows’ the persona more intimately and profoundly than others do; that he “understands” his character and appreciates his values and motives. (p. 216)

The apparent face-to-face relationship between an audience member and media character is referred to as a parasocial relationship; whereas, the process that occurs between the audience member and media character is referred to as parasocial interaction.

Unlike Horton & Wohl who suggested that parasocial interaction exists only for the duration of listening or viewing, other researchers like Nordlund (1978) extended the idea. Nordlund indicated that parasocial interaction occurs when audience members show interest in characters, “participate” in what happens to the characters, and “know” the characters.

Although Horton and Wohl refer to parasocial relationships that occur through radio and television consumption, the majority of parasocial relationship research has

focused on television. For instance, Levy (1979) used focus group discussions and found that parasocial interaction was significantly related to television news viewing. Besides parasocial relationships to newscasters (Houlberg, 1984; Perse, 1990), researchers have also found evidence of parasocial relationships to soap opera characters (Perse & Rubin, 1989; Auter, 1992), celebrities who appear in commercials (Alperstein, 1991) and politicians who frequently appear on television (Wenner, 1983). Rubin & Perse (1987) surveyed 328 daytime soap opera viewers and found that viewers sought social utility gratifications. Many often engaged in post-viewing discussions about soap opera content.

Rob Balon, media analyst with The Benchmark Company in Austin, Texas, said researchers may be missing the mark when concentrating on parasocial relationships and television consumption. Balon believes people connect with their favorite radio personalities on a more intense level than in other media. "It's the theater of the mind. Radio makes you create mental pictures that are much more vivid to you than any TV image can be" ("Tuning in to talk," 1998, p. 50).

A number of researchers have tried to find a link between reduced social opportunities and parasocial interaction (Levy, 1979; Miyazaki, 1981; Nordlund, 1978); however, no strong correlation exists. A study by Rubin, Perse & Powell (1985) showed no significant links between loneliness and parasocial interaction for television news viewing. Data collected from survey questionnaires suggested that factors other than loneliness may motivate television news viewing such as a need for orientation, information seeking and using information obtained in conversations with others. At least in the case of television news viewing, parasocial interaction appears to be an active



pattern of goal-directed or “instrumental” use with audience members seeking out television content to satisfy information needs (Rubin, 1984).

Research has shown parasocial interaction to be an important gratification sought and/or obtained by television viewers (McGuire, 1974; Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rayburn, 1980, 1981; A. Rubin & Perse, 1987; A. Rubin et al., 1985). Wenner (1989) looked at mediated sports. He described the mediated intimacy that occurs between the audience and sportscasters and players as parasocial in nature.

From these studies it appears that parasocial interaction has been established as a motivation of media use, including radio, and an important concept that can be studied from a uses and gratifications perspective.

#### Talk Radio

There is some debate about the actual birth of the talk radio format. Network radio schedules from 1928 listed 21 “talk” programs. These shows featured topics on public affairs, religion, and daytime homemaking (Laufer, 1995). Some radio historians have traced the beginning of talk radio to 1921 when stations began airing market and weather reports to farmers in rural areas of the country. Land-grant colleges in the Midwest with strong departments of agriculture often operated the stations (Sterling & Kittross, 1990). But the how-to talk wasn’t limited to farmers. In 1925, KMA in Shenandoah, Iowa, began featuring a radio homemaker broadcast for farm wives (Birkby, 1991).

Unlike today’s interactive format, early talk shows featured monologues with the host talking to the audience (Munson, 1993). Alexander Woolcott started talking over the air to listeners in 1929. The show, which Woolcott named *The Town Crier*, featured conversations about Woolcott’s experiences – the places he had been and the people he

had seen (Scott, 1996). Some point to *The Goodwill Hour* as the first radio talk show; however, most of the “talk” consisted of host John J. Anthony reading or paraphrasing listeners’ letters. The 1930s program featured Anthony dishing out advice to listeners on a broad range of topics. But most radio historians credit Barry Gray’s 1945 overnight program on WOR in New York with the distinction of the first truly interactive talk radio format. Even Gray himself lays claim to inventing the format (Kurtz, 1996).

The explosion of the talk radio format has been well documented. The number of talk radio stations soared from 238 in 1987 to 875 in 1992, and by 1994, an estimated 1,000 radio stations were using some type of talk program in their format (as cited in Beatty, 1996). According to SABOMedia of New York City, only 53 radio stations had news/talk formats in 1983, compared with 1,000 in 1998 (“Tuning in to talk,” 1998).

There are a number of variations of the talk radio format including issue-oriented shows, psychology and advice programs, sex talk, business and information programs, and sports talk (as cited in Staples, 1998).

The rise in popularity of talk radio might be connected to our commuter culture. Media analysts believe Americans on the road to work are a captive audience, especially when commute-to-work time is on the rise (“Tuning in to talk,” 1998). Michael Harrison, editor of *Talkers* magazine, said talk radio helps keep people connected.

People don’t know their neighbors anymore, and they wouldn’t have time to talk over the backyard fence even if they did. But still, there’s a human need for community, so it’s a virtual, electronic, global media community. (p. 48)

A good portion of modern-day research about talk radio has focused on the uses and gratifications (Armstrong & Rubin, 1989) of talk radio listeners and callers as well as the use of talk radio as interpersonal communication (Avery & Ellis, 1979; Turow, 1974).

Avery, Ellis & Glover (1978) portrayed talk show listeners and callers as lonely, isolated and less socially active. Tramer and Jeffres (1983) studied talk radio callers and found that companionship was the most common motivator. Beatty (1996) looked at talk radio as a forum and companion for listeners in Austin, Texas. Beatty's use of telephone questionnaires, in-depth follow-up interviews and transcribed tapes of talk radio programs helped pinpoint three reasons for listening: companionship, host appeal, and community information. Beatty also found that talk radio listeners did not meet the cliched profile of old, poor, lonely, female shuts-ins. His study suggests that listeners are young, educated males who tend to be both politically and socially active.

Bierig & Dimmick (1979) conducted a test of Turow's hypothesis that suggested talk radio callers are more likely on average to be single, alone, and not a member of any organization. Like Turow, Bierig & Dimmick interviewed callers to talk radio stations. The data confirmed that those who called talk radio programs are seeking companionship. This is in contrast to Crittenden's (1971) findings that callers want to mobilize others to action. Results from Crittenden's survey indicated that listening to *Speak Out*, a half-hour, overtly political call-in show, affected behavior of people in the community and motivated community leaders to resolve problems. A study by Hollander (1996) showed similar results. His telephone survey found that talk radio callers are not socially isolated as some might think, and in fact, open to political mobilization.

Hutchby (1996) looked at confrontation on talk radio by using the conversational analysis method. Unlike other studies, which measured how effective talk radio is as a democratic forum or how talk radio influences public opinion, Hutchby analyzed the actual talk heard on talk radio and focused on argument as its central activity.

### Sports Talk Radio

Sports talk radio shows were first introduced in the 1970s in an effort to attract young males (Scott, 1996). The genre has caught on as evidenced by the increased number of sports talk radio formats (Callahan, 1998; Tramel, 1999) and an increase in revenue among those stations that have converted to the sports talk format (Stark, 1991; Manly, 1998).

Some claim that sports talk is one of the many ways talk radio is adapting to survive in the United State's media-saturated culture. Sports has lured younger men away from political talk radio – the majority of listeners are male and almost three-quarters of the audience is aged 25-54, with the highest concentration in the 35-44 age range (“Tuning in to talk,” 1998). So how are they luring in these young listeners? “They’re doing it by talking about things that they would talk about with their best friends over lunch,” said Walter Sabo of SABOMedia (p. 49).

Hosts of sports talk radio stations encourage listeners to call in and discuss sports topics which allows for spontaneous conversation. Although no more than two percent of the audience will ever have a chance to be heard, those who are heard give the shows a sense of community (Norman, 1990). Callers often discuss “our team” and refer to the team as “we.” Their conversations thrive on the mostly male population that call-in with dissenting opinions.

Because sports have been a dominant component of the male world (Kidd, 1990), little research or information can be found on female sports fans, particularly those who listen or call in to talk sports on the radio. Instead, a number of articles have been written regarding sports talk radio in general, all of them focusing primarily on the male listener or caller (Norman, 1990; Reilly, 1994; Parney, 1994). These authors said that sports radio programs continue to grow in popularity due to the trash talk and “bullshit” (Reilly, 1994, p. 76) of many callers. And although many sports fans appear to be listening to sports call-in programs, only a handful are dialing in. Industry insiders said that only one to two percent of a sports talk show’s listeners call in (Norman, 1990; Murphy, 1996). And those listeners who do call in, do so on a regular basis. (Murphy, 1996).

St. John (1997) claimed the success of sports radio is tied to technology. He said that in the age of the car phone, sports radio is replacing the corner bar as the place to talk sports. Recently, St. John visited with four of the best-known callers to WFAN AM in New York. His mission? To discuss the appeal of sports talk radio. Some of his findings included: callers incur anywhere between \$5-\$70 on their monthly cellular phone bills to call in to WFAN Radio; the longest any one of the callers had gone without calling WFAN was two weeks; and the longest any one of the callers had been put on hold was 3 hours and 23 minutes.

Mueller (1997) looked at listeners who frequently call WSCR AM in Chicago to talk sports. What he found was that much like the trucker’s Citizen’s Band (CB) phenomenon of the 1970s, callers to sports talk shows go by a handle or nickname. For instance, regular callers to WSCR AM in Chicago include “Goose,” “Spaceball,” “Cleveland Mike,” “Browns Backer Ron” and “Formula One Boy.” These chronic callers

often show up at the station's live broadcasts from restaurants and bars where hosts and other callers can connect faces with names. Other discoveries by Mueller include the frequency of program host and caller bonding and caller loyalty. One regular caller admitted to feeling guilty when he calls a competing sports-talk outlet. He said it feels like he is cheating on his wife. These claims indicate the presence of parasocial relationships between hosts and listeners or callers.

Haag (1996), a sports talk radio female listener became hooked on the medium while in graduate school. She turned her obsession into scholarly work and documented her findings while a listener, never a caller, of WFAN AM radio. She described sports radio as one of the last social melting pots, where the unemployed with no place to go during rush hour rub elbows with doctors and lawyers who have cellular phones and houses safely distanced from their urban workplaces. Haag said sports radio belongs to those who spend obscene amounts of time commuting on congested roadways calling in on their car phones while stuck in traffic.

Unlike talk or hate radio, Haag (1996) said callers on sports radio treat others respectfully even when they passionately disagree on a subject. She said sports talk radio is the opposite of hate radio because topics that become too controversial no longer qualify as sports. Hosts vigilantly patrol the boundaries of sports-acceptability and halt any conversation that may introduce political hatred.

This sphere of fandom is one in which people can speak both passionately and respectfully. They can care deeply about issues, but no one will die for expressing opinions on them -- unlike those involved in, say, the abortion debate. (p. 461)

Haag (1996) said that from the evidence on sports talk shows, people want to be thrown together in unexpected, impassioned and even random social relations and communities. They want to interact with people with whom they have nothing but sports in common. She also said that critics of sports talk who claim it circulates bull are missing the mark.

Sports talk revels in useless information and in so doing flouts the Information Age axiom that communication and the access to facts it represents, determines economic viability and identity. A meandering dull sort of front-porch talk -- redundant and aimless but steeped in passion and knowledge, if not information -- in an age when communication is expected to do something, sports talk demonstrates an older function of communication, that of concretizing social rather than economic communities. (p. 466)

Goldberg (1998) disagreed. He said the proliferation of sports talk radio programs indicate democracy's demise, rather than its regeneration. Goldberg believes sports talk radio is very much like hate talk radio. He said that sports talk radio provides a political stage for those who think of themselves as non-political. But like Rush Limbaugh, sports talk enables white men to express themselves as white and male. Goldberg cites a weekly sports talk segment in which listeners are encouraged to call in and gripe not just about sports, but about anything or anyone. The segment has opened the channel for derogatory comments on female lip hair, female sports broadcasters, and women's professional basketball.

## Women and Sports Talk Radio

### Women and Radio

Herta Herzog conducted one of the first studies of women and radio in 1944.

Herzog studied the uses and gratifications of women who listen to daytime serials, or soap operas, on the radio. She compared listeners and nonlisteners and found three uses and gratifications for female listeners: emotional release, wishful thinking and advice. Herzog also found that compared to nonlisteners, listeners were more likely to live in rural areas, less likely to vote or participate in political activities, and spent more time during the day listening to radio (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995).

The daytime radio serial format was not the first to be geared toward females. In fact, radio program targeted toward women began with homemaking programs in the 1920s (Smethers & Jolliffe, 1998-99). Since 1925, “radio homemakers” like those from KMA in Shenandoah, Iowa, have been swapping recipes and providing domestic advice to rural women (Freese, 1991). These domestic programs dominated the Midwest where agriculture was king and nearly 40 percent of all families lived on farms (Smethers & Jolliffe, 1998-99).

Today’s female audience is not likely to tune in for instructions on baking the perfect soufflé. Instead, today’s women want answers about their love lives and relationships. Each day, 14.5 million listeners tune in to hear Dr. Laura Schlessinger dish out advice to the co-dependent and lovelorn. In fact, Schlessinger is the first high-profile talk radio personality to pull in a majority of female listeners. Her audience is 54 percent



female. That's compared to syndicated political talk show host Rush Limbaugh whose audience is 39 percent female, and shock jock Howard Stern whose audience is 28 percent female ("Tuning in to talk," 1998).

There is debate on whether more males or females tune in to talk radio. Some researchers found a greater proportion of male listeners (as cited in Beatty, 1996) or that gender was not a significant discriminator between listeners and non-listeners (Hofstetter et al., 1994; Hollander, 1996). The Benchmark Company (as cited in Beatty, 1996) found a slightly greater percentage of females among talk radio listeners in Austin, Texas. Likewise, Zerbinos (as cited in Hollander, 1996) surveyed her listening audience and found more than half of her listeners were female.

A survey of *McCall's* found that 76 percent of the magazine's readers listened to talk radio, and 41 percent said they listened frequently. Incredibly, 89 percent of the most frequent listeners admitted they liked what they heard on talk radio, even though half of them believed it encouraged disrespect toward women and minorities. And not only did women listen, they also cited the same reasons for tuning in as men: to be amused; to hear someone articulate their feelings; and to enjoy "the rough-and-tumble raunch of the locker room" (Hornaday & Kashef, 1995, p. 82).

Although women are listening to talk radio, it appears they are reluctant to contribute to the interactive conversations. "I know that 50 percent of my listeners are women, but between 70 and 80 percent of my callers are men," said nationally known radio talk show host Diane Rehm ("Women and talk radio," 1996). "We gear ourselves to everybody – the arts, science, politics, everything," Still, the open door policy and broad content does not bring Rehm a lot of female callers.

Political talk show host Mary Matalin agreed. She said women are socialized not to talk as much or throw their opinions out as frequently as men do. “Men give their opinions just to be heard,” said Matalin (p. 3). The difference, she said, is that men will talk just to talk; women will wait until they have a clear statement to make. And so they hesitate to pick up the phone and react as quickly as a male listener might.

Joy Browne, Ph.D., whose show on psychology and relationships is broadcast to 3.5 million listeners, said the common assumption is that women do not call in to talk radio because they are less confrontational.

Argument for argument’s sake is not much a part of women’s lives...we talk to each other all the time – we call someone every day, whether it’s our mom, sister, or best friend. Who do men talk to? Nobody. Maybe talk radio has tapped into that need men have to just talk. (Hornaday & Kashef, 1995, p. 83)

### Women, Sports, and Socialization

Gantz and Wenner (1991) concluded that men and women experience sports, particularly mediated sports, differently. In their study that examined gender differences in sports audiences they found that:

males and females traditionally have been socialized differently: males were encouraged to be assertive, dominant, competitive, vocal; while females were praised for being reactive, submissive, cooperative and quiet. Males have been pushed to participate in sports, emulate star athletes, and root for their favorite teams. To manifest signs of being fiercely competitive has long been acceptable for men. Competitive women have long been cautioned and urged to douse their fire

and keep it within, to take pride in quiet beauty rather than strident exaltation. (p. 241)

Gantz and Wenner's (1991) research concluded that men were more likely than women to talk about sports events beforehand. They were also more likely to keep the action alive after the game by continuing to talk about what happened. Women, more than men, were more likely to watch sports on TV because their friends or families were watching.

Wenner (1989) likened mediated sports to women's society pages and compared mediated sports with the gossip that appears on many women's or society pages of the newspaper. "The legitimized gossip for men is about sporting events rather than social events, but it's socializing, nonetheless" (p. 15).

Gantz and Wenner (1991) also found that men thought themselves more knowledgeable about their most watched sport than did women – 52 percent of men thought they were very knowledgeable, compared with only 18 percent of the women.

The manner in which women have been socialized away from sports is also prevalent among female athletes. Burton-Nelson (1991) said that athletics has been equated with males for so long that some women, even great athletes, don't associate athletic ability with being female. Sports psychologist Mimi Murray, who works with the United States equestrian team, asked the women riders to think of the ideal rider. They described the ideal rider as male. Murray said, "These are the best riders in the United States. Many of them are better than the men they ride with. Yet when they talk about the ideal ride, they think in terms of men" (p. 71).

Archer and Cohen (1997) looked at the use of sports metaphors in legal discourse and their exclusion of women. Harragan (as cited in Archer & Cohen, 1997) said, "Men love sports. From infancy, when they are outfitted in tiny baseball and football outfits; most boys are socialized toward sports. They are encouraged to throw, hit and catch balls, join teams, get dirty, and play hard" (p. 2). Andelman (as cited in Archer & Cohen, 1997) explains that "sports talk is the glue that holds many men's relationships together" (p. 3). Archer & Cohen said this comradeship among males creates a discourse community closed to women. "Men still resent female invasion of their private sanctuary," contended Harragan (as cited in Archer & Cohen, 1997, p. 3). She noted that even women who can speak the language of sports are not usually welcomed into this private sanctuary: male sports enthusiasts tended to view female sports enthusiasts as "weirdos" or "unfeminine."

#### Women & Sports Talk Radio

Stations often define their audience in their advertisements. For instance, WFAN in New York promotes itself as "a station for men with hair on their backs" (Haag, 1996, p. 459). Station management said, "We're a guy's radio station. We're aiming at the men's bracket which is the hardest to reach" (p. 459).

Other radio executives agreed. They claimed the call-in sports format is entertaining for listeners, and they liken it to "two guys sitting in a bar talking about sports with a third guy listening over their shoulders" ("Listening to two guys," 1991, p. 61). Radio executives admit the sports radio format is built to lure in male listeners. "We have women listeners, but we don't pull any punches. It is a guy's radio station" ("Listening to two guys," 1991, p. 61). *Playboy Magazine* (as cited in Haag, 1996) claimed the sports radio format works because it is the only arena left to white men wounded by the

indignities of feminism, affirmative action and other groups' quests for social equality. It's a place where guys can go to talk about guy things.

The guy-talk format is working as evidenced by WEEI Sports Radio in Boston, which prides itself on locker room jock talk. The station's mid-day programming rated No. 2 among males 18 to 54, and No. 1 from 3-6 p.m. in that same demographic (Manly, 1998). Likewise, WFAN in New York generated little advertising revenue before the station changed its format to sports talk. Three years later, the station generated the fourth highest amount in advertising dollars among New York City radio stations. WIP, a Philadelphia sports talk radio station, found similar success with the guy-talk format. The station moved from the twentieth slot in generated advertising dollars to number four (Stark, 1991). "Sports radio has filled a need," said the editor of Radio Business Report J. T. Anderton (as cited in Parney, 1994). "It does a terrific job of reaching men 25 to 54 – major demographics that advertisers want."

But men aren't the only ones listening. Nationally syndicated sports talk host Jim Rome attracts 100,000 listeners a day, and a surprising number of them are women (McAlevey, 1997). Locally, women make up anywhere from two to five percent of the sports talk radio audience (G. Wilburn, personal communication, September 27, 1999).

Sports programmers are quick to point out that, for them, attracting 25-54-year-old men is key. But many also realize the need to attract more listeners, and some are now addressing how to broaden the appeal of their stations (Boehlert, 1994). Sales managers at the two local sports radio stations interviewed for this project agreed. They admitted they would love to broaden their appeal to include more women listeners, and they seemed particularly interested in getting more females to call in and talk about sports. In fact, a

great number of sports radio's hosts frequently can be heard inviting women to get in on the conversation. Most stations, including two researched for this thesis, have in the past sponsored a "Ladies Lines" for women to phone in on. Haag (1996) said those women who do call in are often applauded by the station's hosts.

### Summary

There is a considerable amount of uncharted territory waiting to be explored in the sports talk radio arena. As stated earlier, little research was located in any academic journals or books on the topic of sports talk radio callers or listeners. With the popularity of the sports talk radio format continuing to thrive, further exploration must be pursued to gain a better understanding of the sports talk radio audience, particularly the female audience that sports talk radio's testosterone-laden discussions attract.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore female sports fans' uses and gratifications of sports talk radio. This research will help us discover why women listen to sports talk radio, and explore how they are using the information presented on these programs. This exploratory investigation will help us understand what women gain from listening to sports talk radio. An analysis of women's uses and gratifications was compiled to provide a baseline for future research on this popular phenomenon.

#### Research Approach

##### General

The used and gratifications of females who listen to sports talk radio was explored by analyzing focus group responses and in-depth telephone interview information, and relating this information to descriptive data of listeners.

##### Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive data was collected from all participating subjects either through verbal questions or a written demographic survey. From this information, the researcher identified characteristics of a typical female listener and constructed a profile.

##### Focus Groups

Because so little is known about sports talk radio, qualitative methods were used to identify topics and themes. Qualitative methods allow the researcher to gain a better understanding of attitudes and behavior (Wimmer & Dominick, 1994). Because this was

an exploratory study, there was no need for statistically reliable data that could be generalized to the larger population. Therefore, focus group and in-depth telephone interview methods were used.

Focus groups offer a means to collect a large amount of data quickly. The method uses a controlled group discussion led by a moderator who interviews approximately six to 12 participants simultaneously by asking open-ended questions (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997). A single focus group study can consist of a series of groups; however, typical studies employ anywhere between three and five groups (Morgan & Scannell, 1998). The method allows the researcher to obtain high-quality data in a social context and allows participants the opportunity to compare their views with the views of others in the group. People often make decisions in social contexts and based on discussions with other people. Focus groups also provide quality control on data collection because participants often weed out extreme or false views (Patton, 1987).

Morgan and Krueger (1993) said focus groups should be considered when there is a power differential between participants and decision makers; when there is a gap between professionals and their target audiences; when investigating complex behavior and motivations; and when learning more about the degree of consensus on a topic.

Four focus groups were held - two in Oklahoma City, one in Tulsa and one in Stillwater. Two focus groups were employed in Oklahoma City for two reasons. First, a greater number of participants were identified from the Oklahoma City area. Secondly, The Sports Animal in Oklahoma City is considered the predominant sports talk radio station in the state. It broadcasts local sports talk Monday through Friday, 5:40 a.m. until 8 p.m., and is simulcast on AM stations across the state. Both KQLL and KSPI broadcast



approximately four hours of local sports talk each day, and their broadcast areas are limited.

### Pilot Study

As is recommended by Krueger (1998), a list of focus group questions was submitted to experts prior to the actual focus group interviews. Questions focused on females' opinions of and motivations for listening to sports talk radio. Changes were suggested and made based on the experts' input.

### In-depth Telephone Interviews

In-depth interviews provided a wealth of detail concerning subjects' opinions, values, motivations and experiences. In-depth interviews can be collected either in-person or over the telephone and generally use a smaller number of subjects (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997). A list of questions was asked of all subjects, but there was flexibility allowed in the phrasing, selection and ordering of questions. Like focus groups, data collected from in-depth interviews is unable to be generalized to the entire population (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997).

### Selection of Subjects

A purposive sample of subjects was recruited for both the focus groups and in-depth interviews. Only female subjects who were listeners of Oklahoma sports talk radio stations were included in the study. Since a complete list of female sports talk radio listeners in Oklahoma did not exist and could not be compiled, subjects were located through a snowball or chain referral sampling technique. This technique allowed the researcher to draw upon the expertise of Oklahoma State University athletic department employees and personnel at The Sports Animal in Oklahoma City, KSPI in Stillwater,

and KQLL in Tulsa. These efforts resulted in 23 focus group participants and 19 in-depth telephone interviews. In all, a total of 42 subjects were interviewed for this study. The research focused on listeners and callers of three sports talk radio shows located in Oklahoma: KSPI 780 AM in Stillwater; KQLL 1430 AM in Tulsa; and The Sports Animal, WWLS 104.9 FM and 640 AM in Oklahoma City.

#### Schedule for Conducting Research

All four focus groups and 19 in-depth telephone interviews were conducted during the months of September and October 1999.

#### Data Collection

##### Research Instruments

Data was collected using three different questionnaires. First, a nine-question descriptive data survey was drafted and distributed to all focus group participants (see Appendix A).

A list of seven open-ended questions was used during focus group interviews (see Appendix B) and focused on women's motivations for and opinions of sports talk radio. A general set of questions was asked, but freedom was allowed in the phrasing and ordering of questions, and in probing for additional information. Questions followed a model developed by Richard Krueger (Krueger, 1998). Following is a list of questions asked and how they fit into Krueger's model.

**Q1: Name, what you do, how long been listening to sports talk radio?** This icebreaker or opening question is designed to be answered quickly by every participant. Its purpose is to make people feel comfortable by identifying common characteristics among subjects.

- Q2: What prompted you to start listening to sports talk radio?** This introductory question is designed to introduce the general topic of discussion.
- Q 3: What features of sports talk radio do you like? Dislike?** This transition question helps move the conversation toward the focus of the discussion.
- Q4: Why do you listen to sports talk radio? What are the benefits?** One of several key questions that sought to get respondents to identify benefits without prompting.
- Q5: What do you get from sports talk radio that you don't get from other sports information sources, i.e., newspapers, TV, Internet, etc.?** This second key question was asked to discover why respondents choose radio over other sports information sources.
- Q6: How can sports talk radio appeal to a wider audience of females?** This third key question was asked to discover how talk sports radio stations can improve programming.
- Q7: Of all the things discussed tonight, what's the most important thing for people to know or understand about women who listen to sports talk radio?** This ending question helped bring the discussion to a close and allowed subjects to voice their final position on areas of concern.

Finally, a list of questions for the in-depth telephone interviews was constructed (see Appendix C). The same descriptive data questions that were distributed in survey form to focus group participants were also asked of each subject who participated in an in-depth telephone interview. Following is a list of the in-depth interview questions and rationalization for why each one was asked.

- Q1: What prompted you to start listening to sports talk radio?** This question was asked to determine who introduced the female listener to sports talk radio.
- Q2: What do you like about sports talk radio? Dislike?** This question was asked to help determine possible gratifications obtained by female listeners.
- Q3: Why do you listen to sports talk radio? What are the benefits?** This question was also used to probe for needs and gratifications of female listeners.
- Q4: What do you get from sports talk radio than you don't get from other sports information sources?** This question was also asked to determine the needs and gratifications of female listeners.
- Q5: Do you have a relationship with sports talk radio hosts and/or callers? If so, describe.** This question was asked to determine the existence of a parasocial relationship between hosts, callers and listeners.
- Q6: Tell me about your favorite host or caller. Tell me about your least favorite host or caller.** This question was also asked to determine the existence of any type of parasocial relationship between hosts, callers and listeners.
- Q7: What do the men in your life think about your listening to sports talk radio? What do the women think?** This question was asked to identify the male and female influence on listeners.
- Q8: Think about the last time you were offended by something you heard on sports talk radio. What happened that offended you?** This question was asked to determine what aspects of sports talk radio women identified as offensive.

**Q9: How can sports talk radio appeal to a wider audience of females?** This question was asked to determine how sports talk radio can do a better job of meeting female listeners' needs and gratifications.

**Q10: Of all the things discussed, what's the most important thing for people to know or understand about women who listen to sports talk radio?** This question was asked to clear up any misconceptions about female listeners and also gave subjects the opportunity to voice their opinions on topics that may not have been covered earlier in the interview.

#### Data Analysis

Each of the four focus group discussions was recorded using an audio tape recorder and handwritten notes. All in-depth telephone interview conversations were transcribed using handwritten notes compiled by the researcher. Data were analyzed and categorized according to common themes and differences. Where appropriate, detailed quotes and comments were added to lend depth to the analysis. Suggested motivations of female sports talk radio listeners were compiled based on the data analysis methods listed above.

#### Limitations

A qualitative study such as this one does pose several limitations. The most obvious limitation is that results from the study cannot be generalized to the entire population. Subjects were purposively and conveniently chosen and therefore represent only themselves.

There are a number of disadvantages when working to gather data from focus groups. In most cases, researchers are working with volunteers which can sometimes skew

results. Those volunteers who do participate could be considered more passionate and enthusiastic about the topic of discussion. Focus groups can also become dominated by a self-appointed group leader who monopolizes the conversation and attempts to force his or her opinions on others. To counteract this type of behavior, the moderator encouraged feedback from all participants.

There are also limitations involved with in-depth telephone interviews. Interviewer bias is often a problem, and the quality of data obtained is reliant on the rapport between interviewer and subject. Problems can also arise because subjects may answer a slightly different version of a question or a question not asked of other respondents. Interviewers may also convey their personal attitudes and feelings to the subject through loaded questions or nonverbal cues. And finally, data analysis can present problems due to the fact that an investigator's interpretation of information may differ significantly from another researcher (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997).

It could also be argued that there is a limitation in the manner in which descriptive data was collected. Focus group participants filled out a descriptive data survey following their focus group participation, while in-depth interview subjects answered descriptive data questions over the telephone.

It was somewhat difficult to locate women who listen to sports talk radio. One of the limitations of this study was that female sports talk radio listeners tended not to reveal themselves; therefore, a snowball or chain sampling technique was used. These women might be more easily located through address and membership lists from athletic ticket offices and donor lists or even from lists compiled by the sports talk radio stations; however, no such list from sports talk radio stations could be located for this study.

The sports culture in Oklahoma might also limit the study. There are no professional, major league sports franchises in the state. There are, however, two minor league hockey and baseball teams located in each of the state's largest cities – Oklahoma City and Tulsa. There are rumblings of two minor league football teams that will make their debuts in Oklahoma City and Tulsa within the next year, but despite this array of minor league team sports, collegiate sports dominate the sports culture in Oklahoma. Talk of the University of Oklahoma (OU) and Oklahoma State University (OSU) athletic programs dominate the airwaves, television and sports pages (Tatum, 1998).

Another limitation is that although an effort was made to include a representative number of women with allegiances to both OU and OSU, a majority of the women interviewed for this study did in fact verbalize an allegiance toward OSU. Several of the women who participated in the in-depth telephone interviews demonstrated an allegiance to OU; however, none of the focus group participants verbalized an allegiance to OU.

### Summary

A study of the uses and gratifications of females who listen to sports talk radio is important because no research is available on this topic. Although the information cannot be generalized to the entire population, it is hoped the collected data will provide characteristics of the female listener as well as a baseline for additional research including repeat studies in different radio markets.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### Introduction

Chapter IV includes results obtained from the descriptive data surveys, focus group interviews and in-depth telephone interviews. The goal of the project was to construct a profile of the female sports talk radio listener and to determine female's uses and gratifications of sports talk radio. The findings of this research effort helped meet the stated objectives as outlined in Chapter I. Individual comments are included where appropriate in order to add depth to the analysis in Chapter V. Detailed transcripts of the four focus groups (Appendix B) and 19 in-depth telephone interviews (Appendix C) can be found in the Appendices.

#### Pretest

As mentioned earlier, a pre-test of the focus group questions was conducted with two focus group experts, Dr. Barbara DeSanto, APR, and Dr. Steven Smethers, both professors of mass communication at Oklahoma State University. A list of possible questions was submitted and changes made based on the experts' recommendations prior to the focus group interviews.



## Findings

### Listener Profile

A survey distributed to 42 subjects revealed descriptive data of women who listen to Oklahoma's sports talk radio stations.

Subjects were asked about their sports talk radio preferences. The majority of female listeners prefer WWLS radio. However, many of those subjects who responded said it was the only sports talk radio station broadcast in their area. Twelve percent did not indicate a favorite sports talk radio station.

Women also reported that their least favorite sports talk radio station was WWLS. Twenty one percent said they liked WWLS the least. More than 76 percent of the 42 subjects did not indicate which station was their least favorite.

Tables 1-9 show the breakdown of the remaining descriptive data of subjects who participated in the study.

TABLE 1  
HOURS LISTENED DURING PREVIOUS WEEK

| Number of Hours | Frequency | Distribution<br>Percent (%) |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------------------------|
| Less than 5     | 17        | 40.5                        |
| 5-20 hours      | 19        | 45.2                        |
| 21-40 hours     | 4         | 9.5                         |
| 40+ hours       | 2         | 4.8                         |
| Total           | 42        | 100                         |

Table 1 shows that nearly 86 percent of the subjects tuned in to sports talk radio between zero and 20 hours during the previous week. The majority said they listened anywhere from five to 20 hours. Only two subjects, or 4.8 percent, indicated they listened at least 40 hours during the previous week.

Table 2

## TIME OF DAY WOMEN LISTEN TO SPORTS TALK RADIO

| Time of Day     | Frequency | Distribution<br>Percent (%) |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------------------------|
| Morning         | 6         | 14.3                        |
| AM/PM Drivetime | 19        | 45.2                        |
| Afternoon       | 4         | 9.5                         |
| Lunch           | 5         | 12.0                        |
| All Day         | 4         | 9.5                         |
| No Answer       | 4         | 9.5                         |
| Total           | 42        | 100                         |

Nineteen subjects, or more than 45 percent, indicated they listened to sports talk radio most often during morning or afternoon drive time (Table 2). The remaining responses were fairly evenly scattered across various day parts. Four subjects did not answer.

TABLE 3  
WHERE WOMEN LISTEN TO SPORTS TALK RADIO

| Location   | Frequency | Distribution<br>Percent (%) |
|------------|-----------|-----------------------------|
| In the Car | 29        | 69.1                        |
| At Work    | 8         | 19.0                        |
| At Home    | 4         | 9.5                         |
| No Answer  | 1         | 2.4                         |
| Total      | 42        | 100                         |

Table 3 shows that participants listened to sports talk radio most often in their car. Nearly 70 percent said they listened while driving to or from work. Nineteen percent said they listen at work and 9.5 percent said they listened at home.

TABLE 4  
INFLUENCE ON WOMEN'S LOVE OF SPORTS  
FIRST MOST INFLUENTIAL

| Influence         | Frequency | Distribution<br>Percent (%) |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|
| Father            | 19        | 45.2                        |
| Husband/Boyfriend | 11        | 26.2                        |
| Brother           | 3         | 7.1                         |
| Son               | 2         | 4.8                         |
| Other             | 7         | 16.7                        |
| Total             | 42        | 100                         |

Nineteen participants, or 45 percent, indicated their father was the biggest influence in developing their love of sports (Table 4). Twenty-six percent reported that their husband or boyfriend introduced them to sports. Sixteen percent indicated someone other than those listed sparked their interest in sports. Other influences mentioned included their mother, a coach, or a celebrity athlete.

TABLE 5  
INFLUENCE ON WOMEN'S LOVE OF SPORTS  
SECOND MOST INFLUENTIAL

| Influence         | Frequency | Distribution<br>Percent (%) |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|
| Father            | 5         | 11.9                        |
| Husband/Boyfriend | 10        | 23.8                        |
| Brother           | 5         | 11.9                        |
| Son               | 6         | 14.3                        |
| Other             | 7         | 16.7                        |
| No Answer         | 9         | 21.4                        |
| Total             | 42        | 100                         |

Participants indicated that a husband or boyfriend was the second most influential person in developing their love of sports (Table 5). The remaining responses were spread out fairly evenly between categories. Nine subjects did not answer this question.

TABLE 6  
AGE OF FEMALE LISTENERS

| Age   | Frequency | Distribution<br>Percent (%) |
|-------|-----------|-----------------------------|
| 24-35 | 23        | 54.8                        |
| 36-50 | 13        | 31.0                        |
| 51+   | 6         | 14.2                        |
| Total | 42        | 100                         |

Data reveals that female listeners are generally younger (Table 6). Eighty-six percent or 36 of the 42 respondents were aged 50 or under; 54 percent or 23 of the 42 respondents were aged 24-35. Only 14 percent indicated they were 51 years of age or older.

TABLE 7  
OCCUPATIONS OF FEMALE LISTENERS

| Occupation         | Frequency | Distribution<br>Percent (%) |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|
| Media/Mktg/Sales   | 16        | 38.1                        |
| Management         | 3         | 7.1                         |
| Secretary          | 5         | 11.9                        |
| Medical            | 3         | 7.1                         |
| Retired/Homemaker  | 5         | 11.9                        |
| Athletic Adm/Coach | 4         | 9.5                         |
| Other              | 6         | 14.4                        |
| Total              | 42        | 100                         |

Table 7 reveals that more than one third of participants worked in media, marketing or sales. Eleven percent reported that they were retired or a homemaker. Other responses were scattered fairly evenly throughout the remaining categories.



TABLE 8  
HIGHEST EDUCATION LEVEL COMPLETED  
BY FEMALE LISTENERS

| Education Level Completed | Frequency | Distribution Percent (%) |
|---------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|
| High School               | 9         | 21.4                     |
| Bachelor's Degree         | 23        | 54.8                     |
| Master's Degree           | 10        | 23.8                     |
| Total                     | 42        | 100                      |

Table 8 indicates that female listeners are generally well educated. More than 78 percent possess either a bachelor's or master's degree. More than half of the respondents had earned at least a bachelor's degree.

TABLE 9  
ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME OF FEMALE LISTENERS

| Annual Household<br>Income in dollars | Frequency | Distribution<br>Percent (%) |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|
| Less than 20,000                      | 0         | 0.0                         |
| 20,000-39,999                         | 13        | 31.0                        |
| 40,000-59,999                         | 8         | 19.0                        |
| 60,000-79,999                         | 6         | 14.3                        |
| 80,000-99,999                         | 3         | 7.1                         |
| More than 100,000                     | 11        | 26.2                        |
| No Answer                             | 1         | 2.4                         |
| Total                                 | 42        | 100                         |

There was quite a discrepancy among reported household income. Thirteen of the respondents, or 31 percent, reported an annual household income of \$20,000-\$39,999, while 11 respondents, or 26.2 percent, reported annual household incomes of more than \$100,000 (Table 9). None of the respondents indicated an annual household income of less than \$20,000. One subject did not answer the question.

This exploratory study asked five research questions that produced the following results:

**1. What are the descriptive characteristics of females who listen to sports talk radio Oklahoma?**

Descriptive information shows that the females in this study who listen to Oklahoma's sports talk radio stations, in general, tend to be young, educated and work in media/marketing/sales. Only five of the 42 respondents, or 12 percent, reported being either retired or a homemaker - something that usually indicates a lack of social ties. Descriptive data collected for this study showed that 37 of the 42 respondents, or 88 percent, worked outside the home and 78 percent had received degrees beyond high school. This suggests women listen who are socially connected both through their jobs and higher education, quite different from previous research about talk radio.

There was quite a discrepancy among reported household income. Thirteen of the respondents reported an annual household income of \$20,000-\$39,999, while 11 respondents reported annual household incomes of more than \$100,000. Part of this income discrepancy could be attributed to marital status, a question that was not asked of participants.

There is evidence of a strong male influence on women's interest in sports early in life. When asked who developed their love of sports, 30 of the 42 subjects, or 71 percent, cited their father, husband or a boyfriend. This indicates that women in this study developed their interest in sports at a fairly young age and due to the male influences in their lives.

The majority of female listeners prefer one station, WWLS radio. However, many of those subjects who responded said it was the only sports talk radio station broadcast in their area. Twenty-one percent said WWLS was their least favorite sports talk radio station. Also, several women from the Oklahoma City area commented that they preferred sports talk radio when there were two stations competing in the metro area. This suggests women may not be completely satisfied with their sports talk radio choices.

Women also revealed that they generally listen between five and 20 hours per week in their cars during morning or afternoon drive time. This suggests that women are busy people.

## **2. Why do women listen to Oklahoma's sports talk radio stations?**

A number of participants said they started listening because of a male influence. One woman reported being "a captive audience" in her fiancé's car. Another woman said she started listening because her husband was into sports and "I wanted to share in what was going on." Another respondent replied "My husband told me 'you have to listen to this obnoxious OU guy – Al Eschbach.'" One participant credited her boss: "I rode around with my boss a lot, and that's what he listened to." Still another said "When my son was a teen, he started listening so then I started listening because it helped me communicate with my son better. It's something we can share."

A majority of the women who participated in the study said they listened to sports talk radio for information, entertainment or both. A good number mentioned that they listened because they liked sports, but several also described sports talk radio as "a soap opera." Others cited social reasons; they said it made for good conversation with the guys.

Other reasons for listening included convenience and the quick access of information. "If something happens in the sports world, information is available right away. You don't have to wait until the six o'clock news or tomorrow's newspaper," said one participant.

Some of the women said they enjoy hearing the different opinions of hosts and callers. "You get to hear opinions more," said one focus group participant. Others agreed. A few of the participants said they don't like the controversies or bias that is often heard on sports talk radio. One participant even admitted to turning the dial during the month of November because of the heated talk between OU and OSU fans; a number of women, however, said they enjoyed the verbal battles. "It's funny when OU and OSU cut each other down," said one participant. "I also like it when they trash OU," stated another. "I liked it when there were two stations and the hosts would talk about each other," commented one focus group participant. One woman stated, "I like listening because I feel like I'm eavesdropping on a guys' locker room. I listen because it's fun to listen in on these guys. It's fun what these guys talk about." Another woman agreed, "I like listening in on people's conversations." In fact, one woman said she wants the hosts to take sides: "I can't stand Dean Blevins. He never takes a side on an issue. He always tries to be politically correct, and he's never definitive about anything."

It appears that although most women had never called-in to sports talk radio, they still appreciate the forum it presents for fans. "Callers can have a voice and can make changes come about in regard to coaches and athletes because they often listen. Also, there's not really another forum for sports fans," said one participant. Other subjects agreed. They said they enjoy the opinions on sports talk radio, and they feel it is less filtered than

newspaper or TV. "You get to hear both sides, not just one side like in the newspaper," said one woman. Other reasons for listening include: "you have the ability to voice your opinion" "direct feedback from people in the community" "getting a sense of what the group thinks today" "more opinions" and "public input."

### **3. What do women do with information obtained from Oklahoma's sports talk radio stations?**

It appears that women are listening primarily for instrumental reasons which means they are purposely seeking out information that they can use. "I live with five men, and you can't talk about quilting with five men," stated one focus group participant. "It's what everyone talks about at work," and "It definitely gives you something to talk about with the guys," were other responses. Still another focus group participant commented that "at work, it helps to establish rapport and relationships. You can talk with people on Monday morning about what happened over the weekend." Another woman stated, "It makes for good conversation in mixed company." And another commented, "It carries on into my social life. I have something I can talk to people about."

Several of the women said they listened to sports talk radio to keep their husbands informed. "I also like passing on the information I hear on the radio that he may not know about or have heard yet," said one listener. Another participant agreed: "He thinks it's neat because I'll hear something that he might not hear. It gives us something to talk about." And still another woman commented that "My husband thinks it's funny. When he has a question about something sports-related, I usually have the answer."

A few of the women stated they listened to sports talk radio to find out about hurt or injured players, information that helped them with their fantasy football teams.

Still others indicated they do nothing with information obtained from sports talk radio. One woman described it as “a waste of time.”

#### **4. What role does companionship play between listener and host or caller?**

Several women stated they do not feel like they know the hosts or callers on sports talk radio. “No most of the time I feel the other way – like they’re from Mars,” said one participant. “You definitely gain insight into their personality so that you might think that you know them, but I hope most people realize they aren’t really bonding with them.” stated another. “I don’t think you can really know them, but we might know their ‘character,’” commented one participant. “I have a mental picture of these guys. I would like to see what they look like,” said another listener. In fact, one woman admitted to attending a remote just so she could see if a couple of regular callers to the show looked like she had pictured them.

But some subjects admitted they feel “connected” to sports talk radio. “This is sick, but it is my friend,” said one woman. “It’s part of a daily routine. They’re family,” stated another participant. And although a number of women did say they do not feel like they know the hosts or callers, they did ask a lot of questions about the various hosts: “Who’s the oldest?” “How is Traber’s dad? And “Isn’t Dan taking golf lessons?” were just a few of the questions asked about various hosts. “I’m really into the personalities,” said one woman. “You get hooked, you get to know the handles of these guys,” (callers) commented another. “Oh yes, we know everything about them,” stated one woman.

“Traber has kidney stones, Steely has a girlfriend, Al has a hernia, Dan’s taking golf lessons.”

Throughout this study, several subjects compared sports talk radio to a soap opera. “It’s like a soap opera, with the bad stuff happening at OU, it’s a continuing saga. Who knows what’s going to happen tomorrow on the ‘The Bob Simmons (OSU head coach) Show?’” stated one participant. During two of the four focus groups, participants gossiped and traded information about various hosts and callers; during one group, participants broke out into imitations of several of the hosts. These actions suggest that female listeners feel they know the hosts and even want to know more about the hosts.

#### **5. How might sports talk radio stations attract more female listeners in Oklahoma?**

A number of participants thought that more women would listen to sports talk radio if hosts discussed women’s sports. What was interesting was that most of these women admitted they did not care for women’s sports. “I think they could discuss women’s sports more, but those sports don’t really appeal to me,” offered one participant. “ I don’t really have an interest in women’s athletics, but some women might,” stated another. “I think women’s athletics on the whole, tend to be boring. That’s why they don’t get talked about on the radio,” commented one woman. “You even have athletic directors saying that women’s sports are boring,” said another. One woman said she watched a particular television station because of a female sports anchor. She also admitted that a female host on sports radio would entice her to listen more. She was in the minority, however. Several women suggested using a female host, but they also admitted they might not like listening to a female on the radio. “ Women announcers get on my



nerves. I prefer men,” said one participant. “I just like the locker room talk. I like all males,” said another subject.

A few of the participants said it would be impossible to try to attract more female listeners. “You have to have an interest in sports already,” stated one participant. “I think it’s impossible,” said another. Still another participant stated, “For women to enjoy sports, it has to start at a young age. Maybe we aren’t raising our daughters right. If you like sports, you’ll listen.” Others agreed: “Probably couldn’t – either they’re interested or they’re not” and “Not sure a lot of women are into it. A lot of women could care less” and “Not much they can do. I don’t know any women who listen.” One woman disagreed: “They are missing a big part of their audience. They could get more women to listen.”

Other suggestions included hosts encouraging more female callers, and one focus group suggested holding a clinic for females to teach them the rules of the game.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Conclusions

Results from this exploratory study suggest that women who listen to Oklahoma's sports talk radio stations are young, educated and socially connected. Most listen during drive time to and from work, indicating they are busy, mobile people. Only five of the 42 respondents, or 12 percent, reported being either retired or a homemaker - something that usually indicates a lack of social ties. These findings are similar to what Beatty (1996) and Hollander (1996) found and in contrast to others (Avery, Ellis & Glover, 1978; Tramer & Jeffres, 1983; Turow, 1974) who described talk radio listeners as lonely and socially isolated. The data also suggests that these women are quite different from the audiences who took in the radio homemaker programs of the 1920s and the radio soap opera programs of the 1940s (Smethers & Joliffe, 1998-99; Lowery & DeFleur, 1995).

There was quite a discrepancy among reported household income. Thirteen of the respondents reported an annual household income of \$20,000-\$39,999, while 11 respondents reported annual household incomes of more than \$100,000. Part of this discrepancy could be attributed to marital status, a question that was not asked of participants. This suggests that interest in sports cuts across income lines. It also suggests that these female listeners are people who earn a lot of money and can afford to attend sporting events.

The majority of female listeners prefer one station, WWLS radio. However, many of those subjects who responded said it was the only sports talk radio station broadcast in

their area. Twenty-one percent said WWLS was their least favorite sports talk radio station. Also, several women from the Oklahoma City area commented that they preferred sports talk radio when there were two stations competing in the metro area. This suggests women may not be completely satisfied with their sports talk radio choices.

A majority of the women who participated in the study said they listened to sports talk radio for information, entertainment or both. A good number mentioned that they listened because they liked sports, but several also described sports talk radio as “a soap opera,” something that could indicate the existence of parasocial relationships (Perse & Rubin, 1989; Auter, 1992). Others cited social reasons; they said it made for good conversation with the guys. This is in agreement with Blumler (1979), who found that social environment plays an important role in media needs.

Some of the women said they enjoy hearing the different opinions of hosts and callers. They also indicated that they liked hearing cut-downs, trash-talk, and controversies. A few of the participants said they don’t like the controversies or bias that is often heard; a number of women, however, said they enjoyed the verbal battles. This confirms Hornaday & Kashef (1995) who found that female talk radio listeners enjoy “the rough-and-tumble raunch of the locker room” (p. 82).

It appears that although most women had never called-in to sports talk radio, they still appreciate the forum it presents for fans. They said they enjoy the opinions on sports talk radio, and they feel it is less filtered than newspaper or TV. These findings are in agreement with Crittenden’s (1971) interview of callers to talk radio and Hollander’s (1996) nationwide telephone survey of talk radio listeners that found that callers to talk radio want to be heard and to mobilize others to action.

A number of participants said they started listening to sports talk radio because of a male influence, usually a husband, boyfriend, son or colleague. One woman reported being “a captive audience” in her fiancé’s car. Another woman said she started listening because her husband was into sports and she wanted to share in what was going on. This unanticipated finding is in line with the two-step flow theory first introduced by Lazarsfeld. In a study of Erie County, Ohio voters during the 1940 presidential campaign, researchers found that most people received information about the campaign through word-of-mouth, rather than media (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). Research data clearly showed that social relationships played a role in the manner in which individuals selected media content and were influenced by that content (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). They also discovered that some people among those they studied served as “opinion leaders.” These opinion leaders were people who were more heavily exposed to media and who other individuals turned to for advice and information about the election (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). It appears that when applied to this study, the two-step flow of communication occurs initially when women are introduced to sports talk radio, usually by a male who serves as the opinion leader. It also occurs when women pass on information they obtain from sports talk radio to others, usually males. At this point, the women who listen become the opinion leaders.

It appears that women are listening primarily for instrumental reasons which means they are purposely seeking out information that they can use. Like the participants in Rubin, Perse & Powell’s (1985) survey questionnaire study, women are seeking out content to satisfy their information needs and social utility gratifications as in Rubin &

Perse's (1987) survey of college students who watch soap operas. Women repeatedly commented on how they use information obtained from sports talk radio in conversations with others. They also said it helps establish rapport and makes for good conversation in mixed company. Several of the women said they listened to sports talk radio to keep their husbands informed. These findings confirm Blumler's findings that media consumption can be socially motivated. Because they want to be able to hold conversations about sports, these women indicated they are consuming media for instrumental purposes as suggested by Rubin, Perse & Powell (1985) who found that gratifications sought by television news viewers were associated with information seeking and using information obtained in conversations with others.

Several women stated they do not feel like they know the hosts or callers on sports talk radio. But others indicated through their comments and actions that they do have some sort of relationship with the hosts and callers. In fact, one woman admitted to attending a remote just so she could see if a couple of regular callers to the show looked like she had pictured them. These findings are similar to what Balon suggested when he stated that radio forces listeners to create more vivid mental pictures and to bond more intensely with radio personalities ("Tuning in to talk," 1998).

A few subjects admitted they feel "connected" to sports talk radio, describing it as a friend, family member, or part of the daily routine. And although a number of women did say they do not feel like they know the hosts or callers, they did ask a lot of personal questions about the various hosts. This suggests the presence of parasocial relationships as described by Horton & Wohl (1956) who stated that the appearance of the media performer is routine and counted on as a part of daily life. The researchers also found that

listeners live with the performer and share the small episodes of his public and sometimes private life.

Throughout this study, several subjects compared sports talk radio to a soap opera. This is similar to researchers who found parasocial relationships associated with television soap opera viewing (Rayburn, 1996; Perse & Rubin, 1989; and Auter, 1992). It should be noted that parasocial relationships have been associated not only with soap opera characters, but also television newscasters (Levy, 1979), celebrities who appear in commercials (Alperstein, 1991) and politicians who frequently appear on television (Wenner, 1983).

During two of the four focus groups, participants gossiped and traded information about various hosts and callers; during one group, participants broke out into imitations of several of the hosts, and almost all participants had strong opinions on their favorite and least favorite host or caller. These findings suggest participants feel they know the callers, at least well enough to imitate them, swap gossip about them and choose favorites. The questions women asked and information exchanged indicated the existence of parasocial relationships as defined in previous research (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Nordlund, 1978).

Not only are women developing parasocial relationships with some of the hosts and callers, they often use information obtained during parasocial interaction with the hosts and callers to enhance their interpersonal relationships.

Finally, women suggest that sports talk radio could attract more female listeners by covering women's sports; however, most of these same women admitted they have no interest in women's sports. There appears to be some cognitive dissonance going on with these women. They suggest covering women's sports, but at the same time they admit that

they have no interest in women's sports. This suggests that women are reinforcing the double standard that females are second-rate when it comes to athletics, and that there's no place for women in sports. This could be tied to the way females are socialized toward sports as mentioned by Gantz & Wenner (1991). These findings are similar to Burton-Nelson (1991) who found the United State's best female equestrian riders described the ideal rider as male. These findings also perpetuate the idea that sports is a man's domain (Kidd, 1990). It appears these women are saying that it is acceptable for women to observe and listen to sports, but not to participate in a man's world. This is also similar to the answers generated when women were asked if they had ever called in to sports talk radio. Most said they had not, and would never even contemplate it. Again, this indicates that women feel it's all right to observe, as a sports fan would, but not to participate in the discussion.

Other suggestions for attracting female listeners included encouraging more female callers and hosting a clinic for women to learn the rules of the game. Some participants said nothing could be done to attract more female listeners. They said women must have a reason to listen. They must either be interested in sports or have a person in their lives, like a husband or boyfriend, who motivates them to listen. This finding lends even more support to the two-step flow theory of communication as applied to this study.

One interesting note was that women who participated often felt that men perceived women who listened to sports talk radio as unfeminine. But it also became apparent that some participants felt this way, too. At least one focus group participant stated, "This is a different group then what I expected. I expected softball players."

## Recommendations

### Recommendations for sports talk radio programmers

Indications are that sports talk radio programmers are interested in attracting more female listeners (Boehlert, 1994). Said one participant, "I don't understand why sports radio doesn't try to attract more women. Women have buying power." If so, station management should make a concentrated effort to include variety in their programming. Throughout this study, a number of subjects expressed criticism of hosts' inability to discuss a variety of sports. Women indicated they wanted to hear not only about OU and OSU football, but also about NASCAR, golf, hockey and other sports.

A number of subjects suggested the use of a female co-host to attract more female listeners, and others said the discussion of women's sports, like the WNBA and women's soccer, should attract more female listeners. One interesting note was that even though women suggested more coverage of women's sports, many of those women who suggested it also admitted they had no interest in women's sports. Perhaps one woman summed up the idea when she commented that, "Jim Traber (host) was going off on how worthless women's sports are. I don't watch women's sports either, but they have the right to compete." And still another woman stated that "I support women's sports, even though I don't really like to watch them."

A few women said there is nothing sports talk radio management can do to gain more female listeners. "Either they're interested or they're not," stated one participant. "I think you have to be into sports. I know a lot of women who listen because their boyfriends listen," said another.

Other suggestions included encouraging more females to call in and conducting a



station-sponsored clinic for females that explains the rules of the game.

Station management could also treat females as a niche audience by developing strategies for attracting women to radio remotes or developing a sports talk show just for women.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

As with most exploratory research, this study generated more questions than it answered. Further research should be conducted in different media markets. This study could be replicated in radio markets in other parts of the country. Results of a study in New York or Montana may vary greatly from a study conducted in Oklahoma.

This study could also be replicated using subjects with professional sports allegiances. In Oklahoma, most people are aligned with a collegiate team. It would be interesting to replicate the study with subjects in Denver or Dallas, two cities that feature several professional, major league sports teams.

This study could also be replicated using female sports fans who do not listen to sports talk radio. This information could then be compared to information obtained from those who do listen.

It would also be interesting to replicate the study focusing on male listeners. Comparisons could then be made between men's and women's use of sports talk radio.

Several subjects in this study suggested using female hosts to attract more female listeners to sports talk radio; while others said they did not enjoy listening to female hosts. In addition, a number of women suggested covering women's sports; however, these same women said they had no interest in women's sports. Therefore, it would be

interesting to conduct a study of female sports fans' reactions to male versus female sports hosts and reporters, as well as women's athletic events.

Perception of women who listen to sports talk radio was another topic that came up during this study. Therefore, it would be interesting to research men's perceptions of women who are interested in sports as compared with women's perceptions of women who are interested in sports.

One of the limitations of this study was that female sports talk radio listeners were difficult to locate and tended not to reveal themselves; therefore, a snowball or chain sampling technique was used. These women might be more easily located through address and membership lists from athletic ticket offices and donor lists or even from lists compiled by the sports talk radio stations. No such list from sports talk radio stations could be located for this study.

The female subjects in this study indicated they listened to sports talk radio so they could obtain information to share with the men in their lives. Do men listen for the same reasons? This is another area of research that needs to be explored.

Most of the women in this study said they had never called in to sports talk radio and probably never would. Therefore, it would be interesting to explore the differences between women who call in to sports talk radio and those who only listen.

Another area where research is needed is in the area of women and general talk radio. Very little information was identified that dealt with females who listen to talk radio. A study on the uses and gratifications of women who listen to talk radio would be appropriate as would a study of the differences between women who listen to talk radio and women who listen to sports talk radio.

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## APPENDICES

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**APPENDEIX A**

**DESCRIPTIVE DATA SURVEY**

## Descriptive Data Survey

1. What sports talk radio station do you like the most? The least? Why?
2. In the last week, how many hours did you listen to sports talk radio?
3. What hour of the day do you listen most?
4. What is the number one place where you listen most?
5. Who was/is the greatest male influence in developing your love of sports?  
(Please identify 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> most influential. If *other*, please list who the influence was/is)

\_\_\_\_\_ Father

\_\_\_\_\_ Husband

\_\_\_\_\_ Son

\_\_\_\_\_ Brother

\_\_\_\_\_ Boyfriend

\_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. Age?
7. Occupation?
8. Highest education level completed:
9. Annual Household Income: (please circle)

<20,000

20,000-39,999

40,000-59,999

60,000-79,999

80,000-100,000

>100,000

**APPENDIX B**  
**FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS & RESPONSES**

### **Focus Group #1**

The first focus group of female sports talk radio listeners was conducted in Stillwater, Oklahoma, on September 13, 1999, inside the conference room of the Public Information Building on the Oklahoma State University Campus. Four subjects participated in the focus group.

#### **Q1: Name, what you do, how long been listening to sports talk radio?**

- I started listening 10 years ago while commuting back and forth to work, now I just listen while driving around town.
- I'm retired and I've been involved with sports since 1947. I was married to a former OSU football coach.
- I've been listening for 11 ½ years, ever since I got married.
- I started listening three years ago, when I started working in the university's athletic office.

**Major point:** The length of time women had been listening to sports talk radio varied greatly.

#### **Q2: What prompted you to start listening to sports talk radio?**

- My husband was a football player, then a coach, so I was always listening. I love sports. My son is a coach. I love everything about sports. We'll be at a party and my current husband will yell at me across the room and say, "Honey, who was that quarterback at Alabama in 1980?" At one time, I could tell you every quarterback for every football team.

- Music was boring, and I found sports talk radio a lot more entertaining. I listen for OSU sports information. I enjoy following OSU sports and the sports personalities. I won't know the final score of a game, but I do know who fouled out.
- I read the sports page. On sports talk radio, the callers are irritating to me. It's like get a life. I would like it better if it were fact based and not opinion. That's why I like to read the sports page because I can pick and choose what I want to know about.
- I like it because it helps me keep up with rumors and keep up with what's going on in the athletic department because even though I work there, sometimes we're the last to know anything. Since I work in the OSU Athletic Department, I want to know more about OSU and want to hear the most recent news.

**Major point:** These women indicated they began listening to sports talk radio out of an interest in sports.

**Q 3: What features of sports talk radio do you like? Dislike?**

- I don't like Eschbach.
- I can't stand him. I like Robert Allen because he keeps the fans calm.
- I like the doctor who used to call in about 'Zero U' all the time. That's why I started listening to the station out of Oklahoma City. I would wait for the doctor to call in about 'Zero U.'
- My husband will listen, no matter how much static or interference there is. It's amazing!

- I don't really know why I like it.
- I dislike people with no lives who call in every day or several times a day.
- It's always the same people and some of them don't even know what they're talking about.
- That's why I read the sports page.
- It is irritating that they don't know what they're talking about, but it's also irritating that the sports pages are so biased – with them only one side is aired, that's why I don't read the sports pages.
- *The Daily Oklahoman* is very biased, always has been.
- At least with the newspaper, I put it down if I'm not interested. With the radio, in my case, I'm forced to listen to it because I'm in the car with my husband. I don't have enough patience to listen to all of those callers.
- When my son was coaching, I would listen to sports talk radio and I would get so angry at the criticism, but you couldn't keep from listening, even if they made you mad.
- Today, more young women have sports outlets and opportunities, and they may find it more interesting.
- I hate the fact that the Sports Animal has Jim Rome on at lunch because he's not local. Even if it's information about OU, at least it's local. I like to hear what's going on with whatever sport is in season.

**Major points:** Women focused on things they disliked more than the things they liked about sports talk radio. They indicated they disliked certain hosts and callers. There was also a debate over radio and newspapers and which is more informative.

**Q4: Why do you listen to sports talk radio? What are the benefits?**

- I can talk to my husband about sports.
- You get information and you get to know how different fans feel about things. Some of the things you think, you wonder if other fans feel the same way you do.
- It helps me gain knowledge and get more information that I do working in the athletic department. I also like it when they trash OU. I like to hear them trash OU.
- I enjoy the interviews with coaches and recruits.
- It has made me more interested in other sports like NASCAR, because a lot of times they focus on the driver. With football, they focus on play calling and that just goes over my head.

**Major points:** Participants indicated they listen primarily for information. One woman indicated she listened so she could talk to her husband about sports.

**Q5: What do you get from sports talk radio that you don't get from other sports information sources, ie newspapers, TV, Internet, etc.?**

- Robert Allen (host) has inside information. He's fair and gives an honest evaluation.
- Robert is also positive and excited about what's going on.



- The hosts tend to express their true feelings on radio. In the newspaper, they have to be more politically correct.
- I get more from the newspaper because I can pick and choose what I want to know about. I might read something about Louisiana State University or the New Orleans Saints, but I don't want to hear an hour about it on the radio.
- People write different than they talk. I think they're more honest on the radio. You also get more detail on the radio. With the newspaper, it just hits the highlights only.

**Major points:** Participants indicated they felt sports talk radio was less filtered than newspaper or television and that hosts could speak their true feelings.

**Q6: How can sports talk radio appeal to a wider audience of females?**

- The problem is they probably haven't listened to it. I started listening to it because it's entertaining and I would rather listen to sports than politics or be analyzed by Dr. Laura.
- A lady host. I used to listen to the national one – the Fabulous Sports Babe and she was not offensive.
- I think hosts should explain strategy and bring the game down to my level without making me feel like a moron.
- My grandson tells people, 'My grams knows more about football than any man I know.'
- There has to be an interest by women in the first place. If they talked about NASCAR and soccer, I wouldn't listen.

- I think variety is important.
- I go to ball games for the social aspects. I can't understand women who go to games and read or knit the whole game. There's a woman who sits in front of us and she's always reading or knitting during the ball games.
- I listen to Al Eschbach because he makes me so mad.
- I think women have to have an interest in sports and want to hear a variety of sports out there. You can listen and in an hour you can tune in again and they're talking about something else.

**Major points:** Participants indicated that discussing a variety of sports could help attract more female listeners. They also said that women must have an interest in sports already.

**Q7: Of all the things discussed tonight, what's the most important thing for people to know or understand about women who listen to sports talk radio?**

- We're sports fans just like men.
- It's an outlet for a lot of older women.
- No one is just going to listen, man or woman, if they don't have a connection or interest.
- I think of it as people who are way too into it. I'm not a big fan.
- They have no idea how many older women listen. They've become real fans of Bob Simmons and Eddie Sutton. It's an outlet for them.
- People think that by listening they'll get more information and the latest scoop.

**Major points:** Participants emphasized that women are listening to sports talk radio, but women have to have an interest or connection to sports to be interested in sports talk radio.

### **Focus Group #2**

A second focus group was conducted in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on September 20, 1999, in a meeting room at the Belle Isle Library. Eight subjects participated in this focus group.

**Q1: Name, what you do, how long been listening to sports talk radio?**

- I've been listening for about four years.
- I've been listening to sports talk radio for about 3 years.
- I started listening about five years ago. My boss is a younger guy and it gives us something to talk about.
- I've listened as long as I can remember. I've just always listened.
- I've been listening to sports talk radio for about two years now.
- I started listening about two or three years ago.
- I've been listening to sports talk radio for about five years.
- I probably started listening about three or four years ago.

**Major point:** Participants indicated they had not been listening to sports talk radio for very long.

**Q2: What prompted you to start listening to sports talk radio?**

- Older brother.
- I found it on the FM dial.

- My fiancé listened and I was a captive audience in the car with him. You get hooked, you get to know the handles of these guys.
- I had the same experience. I was in the car with my husband.
- My husband was the commissioner of a fantasy football league and I felt left out because he was spending all his time that way. I wanted to share in what was going on.
- As a member of the media, I wanted to get a pulse on what people are thinking and talking about.
- My husband told me you have to listen to this obnoxious OU guy – Al Eschbach.

**Major point:** Most participants indicated they were introduced to sports talk radio by a male – husband, boyfriend, brother, son, co-worker, etc.

**Q 3: What features of sports talk radio do you like? Dislike?**

- I'm really into the personalities, I feel sorry for Dan Lutz (host) because people pick on him all the time.
- It gives me something to talk about with my husband. I also like passing on information that I hear on the radio that he may not know about or have heard yet.
- I like listening because I feel like I'm eavesdropping on a guys' locker room.
- I like Mike Steely (host).

- I like the intro song to Bill Teegins (regular guest and TV sports anchor).  
The 'Don't Mess with Bill' segment.
- I admire Mike Steely because of how much planning and pre-production he puts into his show – all the different voices and music.
- I don't listen to the morning show because it doesn't focus on sports. It's way too political. Mark Shannon (host) is not a good interviewer.
- It angers me that most of the hosts on sports talk radio seem to only know about one sport like college basketball, football, golf.
- All of the hosts make fun of sports like soccer, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) and NASCAR. It's easy to ridicule something you don't know anything about.
- It's so obvious when they don't anything about a particular sport because they cut the caller off and disregard the question.
- I don't really care what sport is discussed because I listen for entertainment.
- I understand this is a football state, but there are a lot of soccer fans out there. It wouldn't hurt for them to diversify.
- I wouldn't listen if they discussed WNBA and soccer.
- I wouldn't either.
- Me neither.
- You don't downgrade a sport just because you don't know anything about it.

- It makes them look unknowledgeable when they downgrade a sport. We're on to them.
- Soccer is a growing sport, but when the U.S. Women's team won the World Cup Championship, the only thing discussed on sports talk radio was the fact that Brandy Chastain took her shirt off.
- I don't like hearing the same thing day after day. That Brandy Chastain argument went on for a week.
- I listen for entertainment, so I really appreciate the fact that they've limited callers to one call per day.
- It's frightening that they have to limit these people to one call per day. It also scares me when callers have nicknames. Why do they all have to have nicknames?

**Major points:** Participants had mixed responses to this question. About half of the subjects indicated they listened for entertainment and half for information. They also liked for hosts to discuss a variety of sports topics and did not appreciate when hosts downgraded women's sports. One woman compared sports talk radio to eavesdropping on a guy's locker room.

**PROBE QUESTION FROM A PARTICIPANT: Have any of you ever called in?**

- I've called in to promote alumni gatherings. I was always embarrassed and I always gave a false name.
- I called in a long time ago to ask a question about soccer.
- I think there's a lot of women who listen and never think of calling in or would even consider it.

- I'm afraid I would wind up on a promotional spot for the station woman.
- I wouldn't call in because of the callers who call in after me – I'd be afraid they might bash me.
- I'm afraid that if something I say is the slightest bit off, I run the risk of looking like an idiot.
- Guys talk sports a lot in everyday conversations. Women don't, so we're nervous when we call in.
- Men can be intimidated that a woman may know more than them, so you lose if you know something about sports and you lose if you don't.
- The way the hosts rip the WNBA, it's no wonder women don't call in.
- I think there's probably a lot of men who are reluctant to call in too.

**Major points:** Only two women indicated they had ever called in to sports talk radio and one woman who called in used an alias. Most women said they would never even think of calling in.

**PROBE QUESTION: Do you feel like you know the hosts or callers?**

- Before I worked there I listened all the time, and I felt like I knew them.  
But I found a different side when I actually got to know them.
- There's one host who seems oldest to me.
- Just by meeting them in passing or listening to them on the radio, I don't think you can really know them, but we might know their 'character.'
- How's Traber's dad?
- Is Craig the oldest? He sounds the oldest.

- Why are Traber and Lutz no longer doing a show together?
- It's kind of like a soap opera in a way.
- I have a mental picture of these guys. I would like to see what they look like.

**Major points:** Very few of the participants indicated they felt like they knew hosts or callers, but they did ask lots of questions about various hosts and gossiped about them. One participant said she wanted to see what the hosts looked like.

**Q4: Why do you listen to sports talk radio? What are the benefits?**

- I like it because it's entertaining. I like to listen to the interaction, I don't necessarily listen for information. It's sometimes educational. I'm surprised by the statistics that some of the hosts know.
- I listen because it's fun to listen in on these guys. It's fun what guys talk about.
- I do listen for information. I like to hear the betting lines on the games, what the hosts think about them.
- I listen at night mostly to the national shows in order to get a national perspective. I like to listen to the debates. It gets my thought process going.

**Major points:** Participants indicated they listened for the "guy talk," entertainment and information purposes.



**Q5: What do you get from sports talk radio that you don't get from other sports information sources, ie newspapers, TV, Internet, etc.?**

- If something happens in the sports world, information is available right away. You don't have to wait until the six o'clock news or tomorrow's newspaper.
- I enjoy the controversy.
- The bias doesn't bother me. That's what talk radio is about.
- Radio is entertainment, not news. Some people take it as news and that's the problem. That's why it doesn't bother me. I know it's bias.
- I don't like to hear the OSU vs. OU argument.
- I take the month November off because I don't like to hear the OU-OSU bashing.
- I don't like Jim Rome. He's sexist.
- It's like a soap opera.
- I like listening in on people's conversations.
- I can't stand Dean Blevins (host). He never takes a side on an issue. He always tries to be politically correct, and he's never definitive about anything. That way he can come back later and say 'I told you so'.
- Biases are going to come out if you're on the radio for three hours.
- I think the hosts sometimes say bias things just to get people to call in.

**Major points:** Participants indicated they enjoy the opinions that are heard on sports talk radio. One participant compared it to a soap opera, while another participant said she likes listening in on people's conversations.

**Q6: How can sports talk radio appeal to a wider audience of females?**

- They need to have more female callers and personalities.
- Increase the number of female callers.
- Discuss women's sports.
- I think they could discuss women's sports, those sports don't really appeal to me.
- I don't really have any interest in women's athletics either, but some women might.
- Maybe a female host?
- I don't really care if it's a male or female host.
- I just like the locker room talk. I like all males.
- I hope some day we're comfortable listening to a female talk about sports on the radio.

**Major points:** Participants suggestions' for attracting more female listeners included: featuring a female host; encouraging female callers; and discussing women's sports, even though most of the participants said women's sports did not interest them.

**Q7: Of all the things discussed tonight, what's the most important thing for people to know or understand about women who listen to sports talk radio?**

- We're not weird.

- The stereotype is that we're butch or stupid – that's what men think.
- We also know a lot about sports.
- We know about sports, too.

**Major points:** Participants said women who listen to sports talk radio are knowledgeable about sports and are not masculine.

### **Focus Group #3**

A third focus group was conducted in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma on October 4, 1999 in a meeting room at the Belle Isle Library. Six subjects participated.

**Q1: Name, what you do, how long been listening to sports talk radio?**

- I've been listening since about June when I started working in radio sales.
- I've been listening to sports talk radio for about three years.
- I've been listening for probably, I would say, two years.
- I've been listening ever since I moved to Oklahoma City, almost three years.
- I've been listening since 1995.
- I've been listening for about four years.

**Major points:** Participants indicated they had started listening to sports talk radio within the last few years.

**Q2: What prompted you to start listening to sports talk radio?**

- They hired me.
- Because my son was being recruited by colleges a few years ago.

- I live with five men and you can't talk about quilting with five men. You have to arm yourself. It was very informative when my son was being recruited. We knew when the dead period was, etc.
- I listen because I care about OSU.
- I listened when I moved to Oklahoma City because I wanted to hear OSU information. I found it by accident when I was flipping stations. When they had Robert Allen on here locally, I got hooked on it. I liked it when there were two sports talk stations and the hosts would talk about each other. It's not as good now that there's only one station, but I still listen just to punish myself.
- I started listening to get more input and information on both OU and OSU, it was also a relief from traffic reports and I like the guy talk.

**Major points:** Participants indicated they started listening for information. At least two of the participants were introduced to the medium by males.

**Q 3: What features of sports talk radio do you like? Dislike?**

- I like the practice reports, recruiting news. I like inside scoops, although I don't think all of it is true.
- I like the coaches' shows and when they review the games.
- I like the callers – that's one of the main reasons I listen, so someone will say something crazy and I can say, 'hey, did you hear that guy?'
- I didn't listen until the afternoon today because I didn't want to hear the negativity. The hosts were encouraging the OSU fans to call in. Most OU fans never even went to school there.

- I used to be an OU fan, but I got older and smarter.
- Rick from Duncan (caller) is a dumb-dumb. There's dumb-dumbs on both sides.
- Mike Steely (host) is too biased with his uncle character that is based on his dad. How can he not be biased?
- I don't think you can talk about sports and not be biased.
- Bob Barry Jr. (host) went to OU, and he tries very hard to be objective.
- I dislike Steely's 'Babe Tournament.' I think it's classless and a waste of airtime.
- I didn't like the same people calling in all the time, but they took care of that when they limited callers to one call per day.
- I don't like that morning guy Mark Shannon.
- I don't listen to him.
- I used to not like Mark Shannon when he was on another station, but I love the Shannon Singers – I just think they're so clever, the songs they come up with.
- I don't like Mike Steely – they just give him two hours a day and even that is not broadcast statewide. There's something egotistical about him that I don't like.
- I agree – Steely is egotistical.
- I used to get so mad at Traber (host) and Dan Lutz (co-host) because they would fight and Traber would make fun of Dan.

- Isn't Dan taking golf lessons? How? Isn't he in a wheelchair?
- Oh, yes, we know everything about them (the hosts). Traber has kidney stones, Steely has a girlfriend, Al has a hernia, Dan's taking golf lessons.

**Major points:** Participants indicated they liked getting information from sports talk radio. As for their dislikes, they focused mostly on caller and host personalities. They also discussed various elements of the hosts' private lives.

**PROBE QUESTION: Do you feel like you know the hosts or callers?**

- Yes, I feel like I know the callers and hosts.
- A couple of us had a mental picture of what a caller looked like, so we snuck up to a remote she was at to check her out. Paintbrush (another caller) was there too and he looked exactly like what I had imagined.
- I only listen during football season.
- I don't like the attitudes of the hosts that act like you don't know what you're talking about.

**Major points:** Only one participant said yes; however, one participant also admitted to being curious about what callers looked like.

**PROBE QUESTION: Have any of you ever called in?**

- I made an oath to my family that I would never degrade them by calling in, but I have wanted to at times, especially when I have information I know they need or that they're getting wrong.

**Major point:** One participant indicated she would like to call in, but doesn't because of embarrassment to her family.

**Q4: Why do you listen to sports talk radio? What are the benefits?**

- I like inside information. I'm in a fantasy football league and it's good to know who's injured, who's not playing.
- When I'm at home, it keeps me entertained...this is sick, but it is my friend. I listen from 7 a.m. until noon. The host at noon is a turn off. I love Bill Teegins (regular guest and local TV sports anchor).
- The benefit to me is a paycheck (she sales advertising for the Sports Animal) and it's what everyone talks about at work.
- Yes. It definitely gives you more to talk about with the guys.

**Major points:** Participants indicated they listen for information, entertainment and companionship. They also said they use information obtained from sports talk radio in conversations with others.

**Q5: What do you get from sports talk radio that you don't get from other sports information sources, ie newspapers, TV, Internet, etc.?**

- The crass, harsh banter.
- Up to the minute information, game time changes.
- You get a sense of what the group thinks today. You feel like you're bonding, like you're talking to them even if you're not. I was cussing the offense this weekend, that's why I wanted to listen today, but a couple of people called in today and defended the coach, and his play calling and then the host just went on to talk about the New York Mets and I was like, 'I want some answers.' After the last two losses, the head coach only took two calls after the game, saying they had a plane to catch. That's b.s.

- It drags it out – it's a way to get me involved, it builds up as it gets closer to game day, then listening after the game during the week keeps it alive.

**Major point:** Participants indicated that sports talk radio provides more in-depth information and debate.

**Q6: How can sports talk radio appeal to a wider audience of females?**

- Talk about women's sports, a lot of women would be interested if they did talk about soccer. They did talk some about soccer when the world cup was going on because it got so much publicity, but they were talking about the girl taking her shirt off.
- Do something with the hosts. As much as I don't like Steely, he does change up his show.
- Get somebody that's not from here, not tied to OU or OSU. Someone that's not such a chauvinistic pig. Sometimes Steely is so off the subject of sports.
- I dislike the language they use, the stereotyping and bias.
- I don't think they expect women to be listening.
- No, because it's all locker room talk.
- There's a push to get more women to listen, but the on-air guys have been there for so long, that's their persona.
- Most of the hosts say things just to get people to call in.
- Traber and Eschbach are the closest to their on-air personalities.
- With Traber you always hear how great he was, I get tired of that.



- I would rather them be honest and who they really are, if that's closest to their own persona, I get tired of hearing the same comments and opinions.
- Have other media people co-host.
- Doesn't have to be a female.
- You know what the hosts are going to say before they say it, their comments are monotonous. It would be interesting if another station started up.
- Being raised female, there's not a lot of sports for girls to play, therefore, I'm not sure a woman host could speak as intelligently as a man.
- I think I could...but they will not think a woman is valid. My children challenge me – I do not know. I am not valid.
- I like Dean. I think he's valid. He tries to be objective, impartial. It's hard to give a lot of credibility to Al because he never played football. With Dean, he's open, honest.
- I do like Dean, they could lose Jim Traber and Al.
- The 'Total Dominance Hour' sounds small-time – like the World Wrestling Federation – it sounds so fake with Al hanging up on Dean all the time.

**Major points:** Participants indicated that more women might listen to sports talk radio if they introduced new hosts and discussed more topics.

**Q7: Of all the things discussed tonight, what's the most important thing for people to know or understand about women who listen to sports talk radio?**

- My daughters-in-law don't know I'm here tonight. They don't think it's an acceptable place to be. They think I'm obsessive about it (sports radio).
- They say we're living in a man's world: therefore, we need to get as much information as possible to co-habitate with them.
- I think there's also a lot of guys who tape *Oprah*.
- This is a different group than what I expected. I expected softball players. We all have different reasons for listening.
- I think I'll still keep listening after the boys are out of school. I knew nothing when my son started football. It's helped a lot.
- It's like a soap opera – the bad stuff happening at OU, it's a continuing saga. Who knows what's going to happen tomorrow on the Bob Simmons Show?
- When it's on I sometimes want them to stop pissing me off – but I'm not a rabid sports fan.
- Maybe they could do a female football camp and go over offensive and defensive plays, penalties. They do that at high schools in the area. They could even have the station get someone to sponsor it.
- My husband played for the San Diego Chargers and the first thing they did was bring in the wives and taught them about the game of football.

- I don't understand why sports radio doesn't try to attract more women.  
Women have buying power.
- I think they're of the mindset that most women are fighting with for significant other's attention, instead of choosing to learn about the game and enjoy it.
- I was a fantasy football league last year and I was in front of the TV constantly. I think it just takes something like that to get you interested.

**Major points:** Participants suggested holding a clinic to teach women the rules of the game. One woman indicated that she was surprised at the group of women who turned out to discuss sports talk radio. Another woman compared sports talk radio to a soap opera.

#### **Focus Group #4**

A fourth focus group was conducted on October 5, 1999 in Tulsa, Oklahoma inside a classroom on the OSU-Tulsa Campus.

**Q1: Name, what you do, how long been listening to sports talk radio?**

- I've been listening since January.
- I've been listening ever since I was in college.
- Same with me - I started listening when I was in college. I haven't really listened in a while.
- I started listening about three years ago.
- Four years.

**Major point:** Participants indicated they had been listening only a few years or months.

**Q2: What prompted you to start listening to sports talk radio?**

- I listen mostly after football and basketball games.
- That's the same with me – I listen immediately following the games.
- I listen to 1430 AM in Tulsa. I've been listening since January. I listen all day every day. I had a boyfriend who listened all day. I do call in.
- I started listening in college. They would do the coaches show call-in show live from our sorority house.

**Major points:** Most participants indicated they listen most often following a sporting event.

**Q 3: What features of sports talk radio do you like? Dislike?**

- I like when they discuss in detail student athletes, not only what they do on the field. I like for them to talk about academics, player's background.
- I like listening to people break down the game afterwards.
- They make me angry sometimes, but I don't think there's anything I dislike.
- I'm not an OU or OSU fan, but that's all I get on the local station. I'm originally from Ohio – the real OSU!

**Major points:** Participants indicated they listen mostly for information. There was nothing they dislike.

**Q4: Why do you listen to sports talk radio? What are the benefits?**

- It's enjoyable to take a break from music every once in a while.
- At work, it helps to establish rapport and relationships. You can talk with people on Monday morning about what happened over the weekend.

- It helps me keep up with my two fantasy football teams. I know who's hurt and so forth.

**Major points:** Participants indicated they listen for information and so they can discuss sports with others.

**Q5: What do you get from sports talk radio that you don't get from other sports information sources, ie newspapers, TV, Internet, etc.?**

- You get to hear opinions more, get to hear what people think.
- It's immediate. You get information sooner than TV.
- I agree. You can get information a lot quicker.
- In radio, they're more vivid with their descriptions.

**Major points:** Participants said they enjoy hearing opinions. They also like the immediacy of radio.

**Q6: How can sports talk radio appeal to a wider audience of females?**

- They can start by covering women's sports. There's an opportunity there. The media believes the stereotype or myth that all people want to hear about is men's sports.
- I heard people discussing World Cup Soccer on the radio.
- Yes, so did I.
- I don't think you'll hear more coverage of women's sports.
- I think women's athletics on the whole, tend to be boring. That's why they don't get talked about on the radio.
- I like men announcers. I don't know why, but having a female announcer might help.

- I have no preference, whether it's a male or female host. There's only one female – the Fabulous Sports Babe and people make fun of her not because of her lack of knowledge, but because of how she looks.
- And with the WNBA, they talk about how the players look.
- Women announcers get on my nerves. I prefer men.
- I want to hear more females. I watch Channel 2 here in Tulsa because of Laura Reece (sports anchor/reporter). It's nice to see a female talking about sports. I think I would engage more in sports talk radio if there was a female host. It would reach out and grab other women. They need to find a way to engage women and bring up controversial issues in women's sports. They need to challenge women and others to be involved.
- When they did a broadcast from my sorority house the girls were very inclined to ask questions.
- You even have athletic directors saying that women's sports are boring.

**Major points:** Participants indicated that women's sports are boring. They also prefer male announcers. One woman indicated she prefers female sports hosts and anchors. They did not like it when female athletes and hosts were criticized for their looks.

**Q7: Of all the things discussed tonight, what's the most important thing for people to know or understand about women who listen to sports talk radio?**

- We are informed.

- We're listening because we know about sports. On this one national program, a woman will call and once she's gone the hosts will say, 'that was pretty good for a girl.'
- We can be just as knowledgeable as men about sports if we want to be.
- Sports is a sexist world.
- Media and most people think women's sports is boring because it doesn't get the same coverage as men's sports.

**Major points:** Participants indicated that it is important for people to understand that women are knowledgeable about sports.

**APPENDIX C**  
**IN-DEPTH TELEPHONE INTERVIEW**  
**QUESTIONS & RESPONSES**



## **In-depth Telephone Interviews**

**Q1: What prompted you to start listening to sports talk radio?**

- I've always been a sports fan. Growing up, I heard other guys listening to it. Also, my husband listened and he got me hooked on it.
- I have sons and my husband is a former athlete. It's been my choice on the radio for years. It found me.
- I've always been a big sports fan. One day this little old lady at work told me there was a sports radio station, so I began listening.
- I wanted to know more about what's going on with the various sports around the state.
- I've always been interested in sports, and I had met some of the guys who host the shows.
- I've always enjoyed sports ever since I was a youngster. I started listening about five years ago when I became disenchanted with the music on the radio. It started out as background noise, but now I'm addicted.
- I rode around with my boss a lot and that's what he listened to.
- I've just always listened. My family has always listened.
- My brother always listened to it when I was growing up. Then, I came across it by chance one day during basketball season.
- They were discussing OSU football.
- A general interest in sports.

- I'm a big OSU sports fan and when my son was a teen, he started listening so then I started listening because it helped me communicate with my son better. It's something we can share.
- I travel with my job, and I'm in my car four hours a day. I got tired of listening to music so my husband told me about sports talk radio. I had actually listened to it before with him in the car.
- I'm very interested in OSU and high school sports.
- As a coach, it helps keep me informed and gives me a view of what people in the community are thinking and talking about.
- My dad is a huge sports fan and a real quiet person. I found that (sports talk radio) was a way to communicate with him. It's also a way to communicate with the guys.
- I met Jim Traber (sports talk radio host) in 1993 and he told me to start listening.
- I started listening because I have such an interest in basketball.
- I started listening when my son started playing high school football. I would listen to see who got nominated for high school player of the week.

**Major points:** The majority of participants indicated that a male introduced them to sports talk radio.

**Q2: What do you like about sports talk radio?**

- Getting updates on scores, news. I also like the conversation and the battles and controversies that sometimes occur. I enjoy debate among people who bring up good points.

- Just to get myself irritated (laughter). I can only listen to so much music.  
Also, when I get home, I can have a conversation with the males in the house.
- To hear the different opinions.
- To learn about the teams and about what's going on nationwide.
- I like it because they talk about the sports I'm interested in and it's entertaining.
- Sports talk hosts who try to involve the callers. They try to make the show about the callers, not the hosts. I like it that callers have a say in what is discussed. Plus, callers can have a voice and can make changes come about in regards to coaches and athletes because they often listen. Also, there's not really another forum for sports fans.
- Not a lot. I like the information.
- I like to hear the latest happenings, and I like to know what's going on with the teams.
- The comments they make are sometimes funny. I also like hearing what they think about other teams.
- When they talk about OSU and football in general.
- I probably hate more than I like, but I like the callers.
- It's interesting. The callers are interesting, and a lot of them are entertaining, funny, stupid. I mostly listen for entertainment.
- I like to listen to Bob Barry Jr. (host). He gets me in a good mood.

- Interested in opinions. I like the station I listen to because it's slanted toward OSU and you get a lot of information.
- It is informative and at times entertaining.
- For me, it's information. I can stay up with stuff. I've also started to like the personalities.
- That they talk about OU. To get information about OU football.
- You get new opinions about things. It's a little controversial – I like that. It keeps it interesting.
- Listen to hear hosts' comments. I like to hear the callers' reactions to how their team played.

**Major points:** Participants indicated they listen for information and to hear the opinions of hosts and callers.

#### **What do you dislike?**

- Stupid people who call in just initiate things. There's also not enough discussion of professional sports.
- The idiots who call in – some of them are off the wall, but I listen anyway. I love sports.
- I dislike that it's geared more toward men than women.
- I feel like most of the time I'm eavesdropping on a junior high locker room. Al Eschbach's (host) comments are sexist and really immature. It's not geared toward females, very male-slanted and anti-OSU.
- There's never any women who call in and voice their opinions. It's geared toward the men.

- There's not enough hockey coverage.
- It's always the same old stuff. People call in and dog the rival school.  
Nobody's making a new point. I get tired of the same information.
- Chauvinistic attitude, assuming women don't know anything about sports.  
Also you don't hear many women's commercials.
- Idiots who call in. They need to be realistic.
- It's sometimes slanted toward OU.
- They are totally biased. They make no effort to balance coverage. There's also too many commercials. You also don't get much information. The Internet is a better place to get information.
- Some people say things just to get others riled up.
- The same people call in too often. I dislike people who are critical – would rather hear people who are positive.
- I dislike hosts who go out of their way to ridicule a sport. It shows bias and a lack of knowledge. I get so disgusted I sometimes turn it off .
- When callers call up with certain comments.
- There's nothing that I really dislike. I don't really like hockey.
- There's nothing that I don't like.
- Nothing that I dislike.
- I dislike some of the hosts.

**Major points:** Participants indicated they disliked some of the callers. Several said they disliked the fact that sports talk radio is geared toward men. Several also said there was nothing they disliked about it.

**Q3: Why do you listen to sports talk radio? What are the benefits?**

- Very entertaining. More involved when listening to sports talk radio. It keeps you informed.
- I enjoy knowing what's going on in the sports world. It's a bridge during the day. There's humor in it, entertainment, variety.
- It keeps me up on sports. I enjoy sports, keeps me where I can talk about sports.
- For information and entertainment. It's funny sometimes when OU and OSU cut each other down.
- Finding out things about certain athletes that I didn't know.
- You're updated and gathering information on what's happening during the day. I like the immediacy.
- You pick up things you wouldn't pick up from TV. It's nice to hear what other callers and hosts are thinking.
- Information.
- It keeps me informed of what's going on and it carries on into my social life. I have something I can talk to people about.
- To find out information on OSU football.
- You hear things you wouldn't get, especially prior to the Internet. Now I can get information on the Internet, but I still listen to sports radio, but not as much.
- Entertainment. It's fun to listen to the callers. It also helped me become a bigger sports fan.

- You can stay up on sports, it makes for good conversation in mixed company. It's also beneficial because my kids are involved with sports.
- None. It's a waste of time. I'm not much of a TV person and I'm at home all day so I listen to the radio.
- At times it's informative, but I mainly listen for entertainment.
- It gives me a lot of information. I can keep up with injuries. I listen both for entertainment and information.
- I get to find out about the players and get inside information on recruits. They're (sport radio hosts) the first to inform you if a player is transferring or a coach being fired.
- It's easier to listen to sports radio because I'm not at home enough to watch TV.
- Not really any benefits other than I enjoy it.

**Major points:** Participants indicated they listen for either entertainment or information. They also said they enjoy the in-depth information sports talk radio offers.

**Q:4: What do you get from sports talk radio that you don't get from other sports information sources?**

- Up to the minute information. You get to hear both sides, not just one side like in the newspaper.
- It's live, unlike the newspaper and it's convenient because I'm in my car all day.
- I get to hear different opinions on things, get a different point of view. Helps me not be so close-minded.

- The Internet actually has more information, but with radio you get the entertainment.
- Hearing someone's voice. They can also clear up statements that may be misunderstood.
- Sports radio is not as filtered as what you get on TV. Radio opens it up. They (hosts) can respond off the cuff. It's more honest.
- More up to date when things are happening live. I also like the coaches' shows.
- Radio is more current than newspaper. The Internet is not as accountable as radio. You can listen about teams you're interested in.
- Talk show hosts are in the know. They know people involved in the situation and can get their opinion.
- More opinions, hearing what they think. They (radio hosts) often have more inside information. It also goes more in-depth and is funny.
- You get information faster. Also have the ability to voice your opinion.
- To get to hear people's opinions.
- More in-depth on personal basis. The hosts usually have lots of information and that makes you feel closer to the athletes.
- Interaction. You get input from so many people.
- Direct feedback from people in the community. That's something you don't get in print.
- Entertainment.
- Get to listen to everybody call in and give opinions.



- More opinions. You get more out of it.
- You get a lot of public input. I like to hear people call in. I don't get that in the newspaper. In the paper, you only hear one side of the story.

**Major points:** Participants indicated they liked to hear the opinions expressed on sports talk radio. They also enjoyed the immediacy of receiving information.

**Q5: Do you have a relationship with sports talk radio hosts and/or callers? If so, describe.**

- Yes. I feel like people know the hosts or callers. You do get to know the hosts with any radio station, but more so with talk radio.
- I get mental pictures of them, I think they like to put on the air the more flamboyant personalities. As far as knowing them personally, I wouldn't want to.
- I feel like I know a couple of the hosts and some callers even though I've never met them. It was sort of like a friend passed away when Joyce (regular sports talk radio caller/listener) died.
- Yes, because the same callers call in all the time.
- Not really.
- I feel like I personally know some of the callers and some of the hosts. The hosts seem to really make themselves available to fans.
- Mostly with the callers.
- None. I hope not.
- You kind of feel like you know them, especially when they talk about their personal lives.

- Yeah, you feel like you know them a little bit.
- You definitely gain insight into their personality so that you might think that you know them, but I hope most people realize they aren't really bonding with them.
- Probably not the callers. I listened to Bob Barry Jr. (host) and I liked him and got to where I felt like I knew him.
- Yes, after listening, I feel like it's part of a daily routine or that they're family.
- I feel like I know Robert Allen (host).
- No, most of the time I feel the other way – like they're from Mars.
- I grew up listening to Al Eschbach (host). I felt like I knew him somehow. You feel like you know them, like there's some kind of connection there.
- Yes, with some of the repeat callers.
- Not really.
- There for a while I used to. I would listen over lunchtime and felt like I knew them.

**Major points:** Quite a few of the participants indicated they felt like they have a relationship with sports talk radio hosts.

**Q6: Tell me about your favorite host or caller.**

- I like all the hosts for different reasons. They all have strengths.
- None. I don't pick favorites. Some are more irritating than others.
- Bob Barry Jr. (host). He's not rude to callers and he doesn't mind if you disagree. He's polite.

- Al Eschbach (host) because of the way he treats people, he won't put up with anything.
- Don't have any favorites.
- Chris Plank (host) because he focuses on making sure the callers get to voice their opinions. He's also the most approachable and down to earth.
- Bob Barry Jr. and Craig Humphreys (both hosts). They have more variety on their show.
- Bob Barry Jr. (host) because he knows how to speak, most people have no clue. They can't even talk properly.
- My favorite hosts are Dean Blevins, Jim Traber and Al Eschbach and their "Total Dominance Hour" program.
- Robert Allen (host) because he reports on OSU and has inside information. I don't really have a favorite.
- I really like Bob Barry Jr. (host) He's polite. My next favorite is Robert Allen (host) because he always has OSU information.
- Bob Barry Jr. (host) and Killer Bee (caller) because he's funny and does a lot of neat things.
- I enjoy Robert Allen (host) because he always has information. I also like Art (caller) because he seems to be knowledgeable.
- Robert Allen (host) because he likes my sport (soccer).
- Bob Barry Jr. (host) because he provides more entertainment in a way that I like.
- Effie (caller) because she's honest and gives a good opinion.

- Overall, I like the callers who call in more than the hosts. They're more surprising, more controversial. You never know where they're going to come from.

**Major point:** Quite a few participants indicated they liked host Bob Barry Jr. the most.

**Tell me about your least favorite caller or host.**

- I don't like that Boomer Sooner (caller) fella.
- Rick from Duncan (caller). He's obnoxious.
- Jim Traber (host). I dislike his attitude especially when he criticizes the Women's National Basketball Association.
- Al Eschbach (host). I find him the most offensive. His voice is irritating and he stirs up too much trouble.
- I can't stand Al Eschbach (host) because he dislikes OSU.
- Al Eschbach (host) is real degrading to women. I also dislike Rick from Duncan (caller).
- Jim Traber (host) makes me mad.
- I would rather die by being stabbed or strangled than listen to Al Eschbach (host).
- Al Eschbach. He's a moron, and it just goes to show that no matter who you are, you can rise to the top.
- Mike Steely (host). I can't stand all those funny voices on his show and half the time it sounds totally disorganized.
- Al Eschbach (host) grates on my nerves. His shtick has gotten old.

- James Hale (host). He's such a homer. I don't like homers.
- Ryan Rahal. He's the least likable and he argues for the sake of arguing.
- Jim Rome (nationally syndicated host). I can't stand him. He's too arrogant.
- Bob Barry Jr. (host). I really don't know why, there's just something about him.
- Mark Shannon (host). He's a male chauvinistic pig, filthy.
- Al Eschbach drives me crazy. His voice grates on my nerves. Couldn't they get a nice Southern guy with a slower speech pattern (referring to Eschbach's Yankee dialect)? I've been frustrated with him for years because he's not very supportive of OSU.
- Dan Lutz (host) exhibits a negative attitude. He doesn't go out and watch many of the sporting events, he just reads it in the paper and reports it.

**Major point:** Quite a few participants indicated they liked host Al Eschbach the least.

**Q7: What do the men in your life think about your listening to sports talk radio?**

- They love it. So many of my girlfriends butt heads with their husbands because they want to listen to sports talk radio. It's a big advantage.
- They think it's wonderful and very normal. I feel sorry the women my sons' pick because they are going to hate me.
- They think it's great.
- They listen to.
- My dad's all for it.

- My husband loves it. We're both huge sports fans.
- My husband listens too. I listen more now, than he does. He thinks it's neat because I'll hear something that he might not hear. It gives us something to talk about.
- They think it's fine.
- My husband doesn't care. I can tell him stuff that's going on. My brother is out of the country so I can pass on information to him about what's going on.
- My husband thinks it's funny. When he has a question about something sports-related, I usually have the answer.
- My dad is really into sports and my husband and I both enjoy sports. They think it's fine.
- My husband thinks I'm crazy. He's a fan but doesn't listen very often.
- They don't care.
- They're as bad as I am. Most think it's wonderful.
- They listen too. They think it's normal.
- They're all for it. They listen too. I talk with my guy friends about it.
- They think it's cool.
- Some of them think it's odd. They don't expect a woman to listen.
- It's pretty funny because my husband is not a sports fan, he doesn't care for it at all, so I don't listen at home.

**Major points:** Participants indicated the males in their lives are supportive of their listening to sports talk radio. Several admitted to passing on information they hear on the radio to their husbands.

**What do other women think?**

- Some of them think I'm obsessive.
- They think my tastes are a little bit off the wall.
- Some think it's boring, others like it.
- Most women I know don't listen. They think I'm crazy and can't understand why I listen.
- My sisters both listen, so I'm not alone.
- Some women I know think it's cool, but they're not into it like I am.
- I don't listen when I have other women with me in the car.
- I don't really know what my women friends think. My mom thinks it's funny.
- They think it's funny that I'm so into it.
- They see it with some amusement and look at it as a hobby.
- I don't know because I don't really talk about it with other women because not many like sports.
- A lot of women I know listen. Most men can't believe we know so much about sports.
- They think it's OK, because most of the women I hang out with are sports fans too.
- Not sure. I hang around mostly men.

- They think its normal, because some of them listen too.
- Women think it's cool too.
- The women I know think it's fine.
- My daughter doesn't listen at all, and my mom doesn't care.

**Major point:** Participants indicated that some of the women they know think they're crazy for listening to sports talk radio. A few said they know women who listen as well.

**Q9: Think about the last time you were offended by something you heard on sports talk radio. What happened that offended you?**

- Racist comments. You find it with all sports unfortunately.
- I get irritated because there's no real thought process by people. They're always ready to fire a coach. There's so much Monday morning quarterbacking going on.
- Mark Shannon's show is so crude and rude. For instance, they had some penis guy on as a guest the other morning.
- I'm not really bothered by stuff. I think it's funny when Al Eschbach hangs up on people.
- Jim Rome (nationally syndicated host). I changed the channel because he hung up on someone.
- Jim Rome (nationally syndicated host). He puts down women and women's soccer, the WNBA, he gets too offensive, calls NASCAR drivers rednecks.



- I find some of the commercials offensive, like for Top Gun, some product to improve men's sexual performance.
- The Babe Tournament and some of the commercials for the erection products.
- One day Jim Traber (host) was going off on how worthless women's sports are. I don't watch women's sports either, but they have the right to compete.
- It's a little too dirty with the language and off-color jokes.
- Al Eschbach (host) and his comments about women's breasts. We all need to take up a collection and get him some therapy.
- When they say hateful things about OSU, when the hosts dog on women's athletics. Most of the time I get mad when they trash OSU.
- The other day on Mark Shannon's show they were talking about bodily excretions.
- I'm never offended. I think some people that are OU fans that call KSPI have a lot of nerve.
- Al Eschbach (host) because he's pissed me off so much. If I were not in the coaching profession, I would never even turn it on.
- Jim Traber (host) – he was blowing off the WNBA finals. It may not matter to him, but it matters to somebody. He shouldn't be putting it down.
- When some guy called in and said all tennis players are ugly – like that had anything to do with sports.

- It takes a lot for that to happen. I don't get too offended. I just push it out of my mind.
- The language they use can get a little bad at times.

**Major points:** A couple of participants said they don't get offended by what they hear on sports talk radio. Others said they dislike sexist remarks and foul language.

Several of the women focused on specific hosts who offended them.

**Q9: How can sports talk radio appeal to a wider audience of females?**

- If they could get more women involved and listening, they would like it. Also would be good to include a female talk show host. When I produced one of the local sports talk shows, I would have women call and talk to me, but they wouldn't go on the air. Just knowing other women are listening might help. Coverage of women's sports might draw some in, but may not. I support women's sports even though I don't really like to watch them.
- I think it's almost impossible. Men like the arguing and competitiveness. Women are more civilized.
- I think it would be nice to have a lady co-host who knew a lot about sports. Also cover more women's sports and be more positive about women's sports.
- If they had more things on women's sports like basketball, WNBA.
- Taking calls from women, encouraging women to call and talk about other sports like the WNBA.

- Maybe having a female co-host, but she would have to know her stuff, otherwise, she would lose credibility. Also cover more women's sports, even though I don't follow women's sports as much.
- If there was a way to control callers and keep the show moving. Make it have more of a purpose instead of people talking about the same subject for two hours.
- Women need to quit acting like they don't know what they're talking about. Women who call up and act cutesy just reinforce what men think – that women don't know anything about sports. Don't what can do except have a female host.
- If they talked more positively about women's sports and gave it respect.
- Maybe if they covered a wider range of subjects like tennis, WNBA.
- For women to enjoy sports it has to start at a young age. Maybe we aren't raising our daughters right, if you like sports, you'll listen.
- They could get a female host, although it might not make a difference.
- I don't know.
- Probably couldn't – either they're interested or they're not.
- I don't know. Not sure – a lot of women are into it, but a lot of women could care less.
- I think you have to be into sports. I know a lot of women listen because their boyfriends listen.
- Talk about women's sports more.

- Cover women's athletics. I know I would be more interested, it would just add interest.
- Not much they can do. I don't know any women who listen.

**Major points:** Participants suggested featuring a female host and encouraging more female callers and more coverage of women's sports. A few women said they felt it would be impossible to attract many more female listeners.

**Q10: Of all the things discussed so far, what's the most important thing for people to know or understand about women who listen to sports talk radio?**

- Something in our lives got us interested in sports. My dad was a big sports fan growing up, he monopolized the TV. It wasn't that interesting to me then, but it is now.
- That there are those of us who enjoy sports - talking and hearing about it, not just attending games.
- They are missing a big part of their audience. They could get more women to listen.
- That our opinions are important. A lot of times, our opinions are taken for granted. Our opinions are valid, even if we can't remember statistics.
- If women are listening, that means they are just as much a sports fan as males. Women are not taken seriously as sports fans.
- We're just as interested and enjoy sports as much as men. I've missed five home games since 1953. I grew up liking sports.
- It should not be just a man thing. I think when you work with men, it's a good icebreaker in a social setting.

- We're not crazy or weird.
- Women who enjoy sports are not masculine. I love sports, always have. It's a big part of our family life.
- We can be just as knowledgeable as men, if not more so. Someone has referred to sports as a men's domain, but that's not necessarily true.
- There's nothing wrong with it. We like sports too. It's a way to keep informed.
- We're not all dikes. I think that's the perception – you have to be a dike to like sports.
- That we're out there and we're listening. We may not call in. There are probably more listening than people realize. Also, women callers get ripped. Men think they don't know or understand sports.
- Guys don't think women know what they're talking about. Women are into sports and can contribute intelligent comments and help make changes.
- That women do listen.
- I don't really worry about the perception. We do know about sports.
- We can know as much about sports as men.
- That we have a lower tolerance for the testosterone. We dislike hosts and callers putting people down, yelling at them. That's what guys like - less civility. Men feed off the negativity. When people get down on kids on a team, it gets personal. It's probably going to be a slow process – getting more women involved.

- Not all women are completely sports dumb. We're not a bunch of big girls. We're feminine too.

**Major points:** Participants indicated that it is important for people to understand that women who listen to sports talk radio are not masculine and that they are knowledgeable about sports.

**APPENDIX D**

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
STUDY APPROVAL FORM

**OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

Date: August 25, 1999 IRB #: AS-00-084

Proposal Title: "AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF SPORTS TALK RADIO AND THE  
FEMALE LISTENER"

Principal Investigator(s): Barbara DeSanto  
Shelley Brinsfield

Reviewed and  
Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

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Signature:



Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance

August 25, 1999

Date

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modification to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.



## VITA

Shelley Brinsfield

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis:       AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF SPORTS TALK RADIO  
                  & THE FEMALE LISTENER

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